

# **EXPERIENCES OF INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE IN CHILD MARRIAGES IN GHANA**

by

©Harriet Afrakomah Amoah

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## **ABSTRACT**

Globally, over 60 million girls marry before the age of 18. The adverse health and social effects of child marriage are numerous; early marriage denies girls the right to enjoy their childhood and adolescence, creates gender inequality in education, negatively affects employment opportunities, and restricts the freedom to make decisions on psychosocial/emotional well-being. More recent research, mostly quantitative, shows the increased risk of IPV among women who marry before 18 years of age. However, there is a dearth of research on the factors that predispose this group of women to IPV, especially in Sub-Saharan Africa which houses a large percentage of the world's child brides. Similarly, the IPV literature mostly explores IPV experiences among women in the general population, paying little attention to the unique experiences of "child brides."

Using 15 semi-structured, qualitative, in-depth interviews, I probe the lived experience, context, narratives, and subjective meanings Ghanaian women who marry as children give to child marriage and IPV, and the factors which according to these women, contribute to their IPV experiences. The women in my study come from the Bawku West district in the Upper East region of Ghana. Most say they have experienced physical, emotional, sexual, and economic abuse from their intimate partners. They are economically dependent on their partners and/or have insufficient autonomy to either refuse sex or make decisions because of the wide age gap. Some also identify issues such as polygamy and cultural beliefs and practices as contributing factors.

This study demonstrates the need to raise awareness among Ghanaians on the detrimental effect of child marriage and to enact policies/law against the practice.

Keywords: Ghana, intimate partner violence, women, child marriage, qualitative study

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# **CHAPTER 1**

## **INTRODUCTION**

Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) is an important public health, social policy, and human rights issue which disproportionately affects women (Conroy, 2014; Kidman, 2016; Raj, 2010; Speizer & Pearson, 2011; Tenkorang et al., 2016; World Health Organization (WHO), 2016). A global study conducted by the World Health Organization shows one in three or 33 percent of all women experience physical or sexual violence from an intimate partner in their lifetime (WHO, 2016). Findings from a WHO multi-country study on women's health and domestic violence shows the pervasiveness of IPV among women who have ever been in an intimate relationship; between 13 and 61 percent are victims of physical violence from a partner; 6–59 percent report sexual violence from an intimate partner; 20–75 percent report experiencing at least one emotionally or psychologically abusive act from an intimate partner (Garcia-Moreno, et al., 2005, 2006; WHO, 2012).

Although a global issue, IPV is especially common in areas where the perpetuation of violence against women is deemed as acceptable by the society (Kidman, 2016; Speizer & Pearson, 2011; Tenkorang et al., 2016). The acceptance of this practice makes it difficult to acknowledge that violence violates the rights of women and significantly delays women's path to self-sufficiency and empowerment. Africa is one region where such practices are common, and research shows that 12-54 percent of African women are abused in their intimate relationships (Olayanju et al., 2013). In Ghana, for example, one in three women experiences physical abuse from an intimate partner (Amoakohene, 2004; Tenkorang et al., 2013). A report by the Ghanaian Domestic Violence and Victim Support Unit (DOVVSU) shows an enormous increase in the

number of incidents of wife battery and assault, from 2,795 in 2013 to 5,212 in 2014 (Abbey, 2015). Further, a national study on violence against women in Ghana finds that three in 10 women are forced to have sex with their male partners, and the first sexual intercourse of two out of 10 women is forced (Gender Studies & Human Rights Documentation Centre [GSHRDC], 2015).

The data on child marriage, an aspect of violence perpetrated against women, are equally stark. Globally, about 46 percent of young women between the ages of 20 and 24 are married before they are 18 years, with the highest percentages found in South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa (Kidman, 2016; Raj, 2010; Walker, 2012). In many Sub-Saharan African countries, over 40-49 percent of girls marry or are in conjugal unions before they turn 18 (Raj, 2010; United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), 2001; Walker, 2012;). Although child marriage in Ghana appears at a lower rate, it is still alarming: one in four girls is married before her 18th birthday (Ghana Demographic and Health Survey, 2008; Ghana Statistical Service, 2011; Ghana Web, 2014; UNICEF, 2015). This finding is backed up by a report by the Ghana Demographic and Health Survey (2008).

Governments and civil society organizations have recently begun to advocate for laws and policies to reduce the prevalence of child marriage in Ghana. They are also seeking to increase awareness by involving and educating stakeholders — communities, family heads and religious leaders, and the police — on the detrimental effects of child marriage. For example, in 2016, the Child Marriage Coordination Unit of the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection launched a national strategic framework to end child marriage in Ghana by 2030 (UNICEF, 2016). The aim is to involve all national stakeholders in curbing and eliminating child marriage.



The association between child marriage and IPV is complex, but child marriage is often considered a risk factor for experiencing IPV. In a recent comparative study of 34 countries, Kidman (2016) finds women are at higher risk of experiencing IPV should they marry before the age of 18. Similarly, in an Ethiopian study, Erulkar (2013) finds the first sexual encounter of women who marry before age 18 is more likely to be forced than is the first encounter of women who marry later. Other research highlights adverse health and social effects of child marriage (see; Nasrullah et al., 2015; Nour, 2006, 2009; Raj, 2010; Raj et al., 2010; UNICEF, 2005; Walker, 2012;). Child marriage denies girls the right to enjoy their childhood and adolescence, curtails their education, and restricts their freedom to make decisions on their psychosocial/emotional well-being or their reproductive health (UNICEF, 2001). Other consequences of child marriage include the risk of early or unwanted pregnancies, birth complications, such as vesico-vaginal fistula, pregnancy-induced hypertension, obstructed labor or death, HIV/AIDS or Sexually Transmitted Infections (STI), and loss of autonomy (Raj, 2010; UNICEF, 2005; Walker, 2012).

Despite the scholarly evidence of the predominance of IPV in child marriages and its associated consequences, little is known about child marriage and IPV in Sub-Saharan Africa, including Ghana (Kidman, 2016; Raj et al., 2010; Rahman et al., 2014). Most studies on IPV against women concentrate on the incidence of IPV among women in the general population. Little is known about the knowledge, perceptions, and experiences of women who marry before 18 although child brides are understood to be more vulnerable to violence (Kidman, 2016). Furthermore, the few existing studies of IPV and child marriage are quantitative and focus on assessing the prevalence of IPV in child marriages (Hong Le et al., 2014; Kidman, 2016;

Rahman et al., 2014; Raj et al., 2010; Speizer & Pearson, 2011). Although such studies are essential, they are limited in explaining and describing the lived IPV experiences of child brides.

My study, described in this thesis, employed qualitative methods to fill this important research gap. In what follows, I draw on the findings of my semi-structured in-depth qualitative interviews to illuminate the context, the narratives, and the subjective meanings Ghanaian women who married as children give to their experiences of IPV. In addition, I explore the factors, which according to these women, contribute to IPV and early marriages. Simply stated, my thesis examines the IPV experiences of 15 ever-married women<sup>1</sup> who married as children (before 18 years) in Ghana. Its specific aim is to explore the knowledge, understanding, opinions, and experiences of Ghanaian women on child marriage and IPV. It considers IPV in heterosexual relationships<sup>2</sup> as child marriage usually occurs in such relationships in Ghana (Raj, 2010; Walker, 2012).

## **Research Questions**

The research questions shaping the dissertation and the preceding study are the following:

- What factors, according to women, influence child marriages in Ghana?
- What are the IPV experiences of Ghanaian women who married before age 18?
- What factors, according to Ghanaian women, contribute to IPV in early marriages?
- How do women's perceptions of gender role socialization influence IPV experiences in child marriage?

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<sup>1</sup> Ever married women refers to women who are currently married, divorced/separated, or widowed.

<sup>2</sup> Intimate partner violence (IPV) occurs in both same sex and heterosexual relationships but IPV in child marriages is rampant in heterosexual relationships in Ghana.

## **1.2. Outline of Thesis**

In this first chapter, I briefly discuss child marriage and intimate partner violence and note the gaps in the literature. I explore the existing scholarship to determine the factors contributing to intimate partner violence and child marriage and the IPV experiences of women who marry before 18 years, and I discuss the theoretical framework of the study I conducted in Ghana. Chapter Two describes the methods used in the research. Chapter Three presents the study results, and Chapter Four sets results in conversation with extent scholarship. Chapter Five concludes the dissertation; in this chapter, I note the study's strengths and limitations, offer suggestions for future research, and make some policy recommendations.

## **1.3. Child Marriage: A Global Overview**

Child marriage is often defined as marriage before the age of 18 (Alhassan, 2013; Kidman, 2016; Nour, 2009 & 2006; Otoo-Oyortey & Pobi, 2003). Alhassan (2013) notes that child marriage is also termed “forced marriage” because it often involves an element of force: a marriage partner is imposed on the child who is mostly unable to freely make an informed decision about a life partner. Others refer to child marriage as “early marriage,” because according to United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) (2006), the girl is not physically, physiologically, or psychologically ready to shoulder the responsibilities of marriage and childbearing. Child marriage is predominantly a gender and rural concern; rates are higher in rural areas and among females (Akapule, 2016; UNICEF, 2005; UNICEF, 2015). UNICEF (2015) indicates that the rate of child marriage increased from 30.6 percent in 2006 to 36.2 percent in 2011 across all rural areas in Ghana, while, at the same time, it dropped slightly, from 20.5 to 19.4 percent, in urban areas.

Research shows that the rates of child marriages remain high globally, and the consequences are diverse. Accordingly, various international and local laws have been enacted to protect children, especially girls. International laws include the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). This law states that “the betrothal and the marriage of a child shall have no legal effect” (Otoo-Oyortey & Pobi, 2003, p. 43) and calls on states to set a legal minimum age for marriage (UNICEF, 2001; UNFPA, 2006). In Ghana, the 1992 Constitution and the Children’s Act (Act 560) sets the minimum legal age for marriage at 18. Section 14 of the Act specifies that no person shall force a child to be betrothed, to be subject of a dowry transaction, or to be married (Children’s Act, 1998).

Despite the law, the practice persists in Ghana, for multiple interrelated historical, social, cultural, religious, economic, and sociological reasons (Alhassan, 2013; Nour, 2006; UNICEF, 2005, 2001; Walker, 2012). A study by the United Nations Population Fund shows a strong connection between child marriage and poverty (UNFPA, 2012); when parents are unable to economically provide for the wellbeing of the family, marrying off the girl child becomes a survival strategy and an important way to escape poverty (Alhassan, 2013; Nour, 2006; UNFPA, 2006; UNICEF, 2001; Walker, 2012). UNFPA’s (2006) findings are confirmed in a Ghanaian study by Alhassan (2013). The study discovers that most child brides are forced into marriage because their parents are unable to meet their financial needs; they believe they will financially and socially benefit from the marriage. In Ghana, the bride’s family requires a dowry, commonly known as the bride wealth or price, from the groom’s family (Alhassan, 2013; Otoo-Oyortey & Pobi, 2003; Svanemyr et al., 2012): The bride price takes the form of money, goods, and livestock, depending on the community or the society, and parents use these to offset immediate economic needs (Alhassan, 2013, 2010; UNICEF, 2001; Women in Law & Development in

Africa (WILDAF), 2014). A study by Alhassan (2010) in the Northern part of Ghana reveals that the money and/or cattle demanded as part of the bride price are often used to settle debts or support daily living expenses. In some rural communities, potential suitors are required to help the girl's family on their farm (Somerset, 2000).

Child marriage is also more common in rural communities because such communities retain strong religious and cultural views (Alhassan, 2013 & 2010), including the value placed on a woman's virginity until marriage. Child or early marriage is seen as a way of protecting girls from engaging in premarital sexual activities. In addition to the potential for teenage pregnancy or sexually transmitted disease, engaging in pre-marital sex brings shame and dishonour to the family, as families are blamed for inappropriate behaviours of their members (Alhassan, 2013 & 2010; Nour, 2009; UNICEF, 2001; UNFPA, 2006). Alhassan (2010) shows parents prize marriage and the preservation of a girl's virginity to such an extent that they may withdraw their daughters from school. Somerset (2000) notes that the high rate of early marriage is partly due to the increasing number of schoolgirls who become pregnant after engaging in premarital sex with their fellow pupils. Other reasons include the desire to marry a girl child into a "good" family and establish good social and family ties (Nour, 2009; Svanemyr et al., 2012; UNFPA, 2006), to seal deals over property especially land, and to settle disputes. A final reason is a lack of formal education (Alhassan, 2013; Erulkar, 2013). For example, in an Ethiopian study, Erulkar (2013) discovered the majority of his respondents who married at a very early age had never been to school.

### **1.3.1. Child marriage and IPV**

Socio-cultural factors which encourage child marriage and make it acceptable reinforce the perpetuation of abuse, including IPV, against women in such marriages (Amoakohene, 2004;

Ampofo,1993; Devries et al. 2013; Kidman, 2016; Tenkorang, Owusu, Bannerman & Yeboah, 2013). The World Health Organization (WHO) describes IPV as any behaviour within an intimate or former relationship that triggers physical, sexual, or psychological harm; it involves acts of physical aggression, sexual coercion, emotional abuse, economic abuse, and controlling behaviours (WHO, 2016). Acts of sexual violence include the following: forced sexual intercourse and other forms of sexual coercion; physical abuse, such as slapping, kicking, beating, pushing/pulling, and hitting; psychological or emotional abuse, such as insults, constant humiliation, belittling, bullying, threats to harm, or taking away children; controlling behaviours, such as isolating a woman from family and friends and monitoring and restricting her activities and movements (WHO, 2012).

Studies show that women who marry before 18 years are more vulnerable to IPV (Kidman, 2016; Nasrullah et al., 2015, 2016; Rahman et al., 2014; Speizer & Pearson, 2011; UNICEF, 2005). In Pakistan, Nasrullah et al. (2014) note that about one-third of women who marry before age 18 experience more controlling behaviours from their spouses than those who marry as adults. They postulate that these controlling behaviours may increase the probability of physical and sexual violence. Similar behavioural issues are found in studies by Rahman et al. (2014) and Raj et al. (2010) on the association between adolescent marriage and IPV in India and Bangladesh, respectively. Both authors discover that women who marry before age 18 have a heightened risk of experiencing both sexual and physical abuse, although the connection between child marriage and physical abuse is stronger than that of child marriage and sexual abuse, possibly because sexual violence is under-reported, acceptable, and understood as a husband's conjugal right (Rahman et al., 2014; Raj et al., 2010). Confirming this tendency in other settings, Kidman (2016) finds sexual abuse is under-reported by child brides because of strongly held

traditional gender views and patriarchal norms. Such beliefs may elicit abusive behaviours. By the same token, Nasrullah et al.'s (2015) qualitative study on child marriage and IPV in Pakistan finds a majority of respondents who married between the age of 11 and 17 experienced psychological violence ( Kidman, 2016; Nasrullah et al., 2015,2016; Rahman et al., 2014; Speizer & Pearson, 2011; UNICEF, 2005).

Studies show that most women who marry early or as children are more likely to justify a husband's controlling behaviours and physical abuse (Jensen and Thornton, 2003; UNICEF, 2005). A recent study by Nasrullah et al. (2017) on child marriage and women's attitudes to wife beating in Pakistan notes that women who marry as children are more likely to justify wife beating than women who marry as adults. This justification, according to Kidman (2016), stems from the internalization of traditional gender norms passed on to girls during socialization. These internalized norms cause women to believe men have the "right" to control or "discipline" their behavior, even through violence, and they are required to submit to them. For instance, some women believe it is acceptable for their husbands to beat or hit them if they go out without seeking permission, if they neglect their children, if they argue or nag "too much," or if they refuse to have sexual intercourse (Cantalupo et al., 2006; Nasrullah et al., 2017).

Research on IPV against women documents short and long-term physical, mental, sexual, and reproductive health implications (Amoakohene, 2004; Sedziafa, Tenkorang & Owusu, 2016; Tenkorang et al., 2013; WHO, 2016, 2012). These include death/suicide, physical injuries, depression, post-traumatic stress, anxiety disorders, sleep difficulties, miscarriages, unintended pregnancies, and sexually transmitted infections, including HIV. For instance, a multi-country study by Garcia-Moreno et al. (2005) reveals that emotional distress resulting in attempted suicide or suicide is more common among women who experience physical or sexual

violence than those who do not. Beyond the direct threat to women, IPV adversely affects children, families, and societies (WHO, 2016, 2012). According to WHO (2016), the social and economic impact of IPV on societies includes loss of economic productivity, as abuse can impair women's ability to work effectively.

Despite the harmful effects of IPV, many women are reluctant to report it or to seek social support. They prefer to stay in abusive relationships for various reasons (Cantalupo et al., 2006; Sedziafa et al., 2016; WHO, 2012). These include concern for their children, fear of the partner's revenge, love, anticipation of a change in the partner's behaviour, lack of alternative financial or economic support, lack of support from family and friends, divorce-related stigma, and fear of losing custody of children after divorce (WHO, 2012). As a specific example, Sedziafa et al. (2016) observed that even though most of their study participants were knowledgeable about legal support systems, they were reluctant to report their experiences of abuse because of distance to the police station, fear of abandonment, inability to pay for transportation, discouragement from friends and families about disclosing abuse to "outsiders," stigma, and fear of the spouse being imprisoned, leaving the wife to bear the responsibility of caring for the children (Sedziafa, Tenkorang, & Owusu, 2016). A study by Cantalupo et al. (2006) in Ghana finds domestic violence is regarded as a private family issue that should be addressed within the home, not in the criminal justice system.

### **1.3.2. Factors influencing IPV in child marriages**

Researchers identify a number of factors accounting for the link between child marriage and IPV risk: wide spousal age gaps, age at first marriage, poverty, low or no education, and women's adherence to traditional gender norms (Kidman, 2016; Jensen & Thornton, 2003). For example, a study of 2,400 married women in Iran by Faramarzi, Esmailzadeh, and Mosavi



(2005) shows that women who marry early have 2.23 greater odds of experiencing IPV than women who marry later. Jensen and Thornton (2003) find the age gap can be much greater in child marriages than in marriages of two adults; they make the striking discovery that in Benin, the husband-wife age gap for women who marry before age 15 is 11.1 years, while the average age gap for those who marry after 30 is 4.9 years. The greater age gap may trigger more controlling behaviours from husbands and affect women's status and ability to assert agency in the home.

A study by Abramsky et al. (2011) in 10 countries using data from the WHO Multi-Country Study on Women's Health and Domestic Violence finds a strong connection between the level of formal education and IPV. Similarly, in Ethiopia, Erulkar (2013) discover that 48 percent of the 1,671 respondents who married before 18 years had no formal education, and 32 percent had one to eight years of schooling. Arguably, a higher level of education increases a woman's socioeconomic status and lessens her dependence on a man for economic survival. However, Nasrullah et al.'s (2015) qualitative study on the circumstances leading to IPV against women who marry as children in Pakistan suggests other factors and conditions. The women studied had a unique perspective on the causes of IPV in child marriage; they considered family matters, including poor house management, lack of proper care of children, insufficient dowry, financial problems, acting against the will of husband, and inability to give birth to a male child, as contributing to their IPV experiences.

Despite the prevalence of IPV in child marriages and the associated consequences, there is a lack of research on the lived IPV experiences of child brides or the factors that these women say contribute/ expose them to IPV and child marriage. Almost all research concentrates on the incidence of IPV among women in this age group. Although quantitative studies have established

an association between child marriage and IPV, little qualitative work explores the factors that predispose child brides to IPV. To bridge this gap and expand the literature, in my study, I examined women's perspectives and experiences of IPV, looking specifically at early marriages and IPV in Ghana.

#### **1.4. Theoretical framework: Feminist theoretical explanation of IPV against women**

Feminist theory explains IPV against women as gendered (Anderson, 1997; Price, 2005). According to Conroy (2014), IPV among women in Sub-Saharan Africa can be seen through the lens of a gender-based power imbalance. In such explanations, IPV is an act directed at women by men to maintain power and control, especially in patriarchal societies where men are considered superior. Entrenched patriarchy creates a system of inequality, with a power imbalance between the sexes. In what follows, I draw on feminist analysis, especially African feminist analysis and explanations of domestic violence (IPV), to understand the strong association between child marriages and IPV.

Black et al. (2010) say, "Feminists view violence against women as a social and political problem that affects all women and [they] locate relationship violence within the pervading traditional power structures of male dominance and female subservience" (p. 175). Similarly, African feminist scholars argue that violence perpetrated against women usually originates from unequal gendered power relations entrenched in a patriarchal system (Amoakohene, 2004; Ampofo, 1993; Bowman, 2003; Ofei-Aboagye, 1994). Patriarchy, according to Walby (1990), is a system of societal structured institutions and practices that encourage male domination and oppress and exploit women. Lisa Price (2005) says social institutions, such as the family, marriage, and religion, use a consistent pattern of ideological and structural practices in the justification and perpetuation of men's abuse of women (p.25). Most feminist scholars

emphasize that the notion of male domination is socially constructed, not biological. Individuals are not biologically assigned a dominant position by virtue of their sex; rather, society assigns this position to men to maintain women's subordination. It is important to note that Ghana is recognized as a patriarchal society, engaging certain values, norms, beliefs, and cultural practices to encourage male control and female subservience (Ampofo, Okyerefo & Pervarah, 2009; Offei-Aboagye, 1994). Offei-Aboagye remarks that the notion of male superiority in Ghanaian society is valued and cherished and, as such, is passed on from one generation to another through "folklore, oral traditions, and proverbs" (1994, p. 931).

African feminist scholars have attributed the differential gender power relations that result in higher rates of IPV among women to factors such as religious beliefs, gender roles, and cultural norms supporting females' subordinate position. These gendered understandings of power lead to women's low socioeconomic status, passivity, and economic dependence on men (Amoakohene, 2004; Anderson, 1997; Offei-Aboagye, 1994; Tenkorang et al., 2013).

For instance, religions, like many other social institutions, use teachings and practices to instill value and belief systems in their members (Christ & Plaskow, 1979; Fortune & Enger, 2005; Westenberg, 2017). With time, these become embedded in the social and cultural norms of individuals. Feminist researchers point out that some religious teachings reinforce the patriarchal language of male domination over women, and this, in turn, encourages the perpetuation of sexism and violence against women, including IPV. For example, the Christian religion admonishes wives to be submissive to their husbands, as they are to the Christ. This type of language produces an imbalanced gender relationship, putting men in a position of power. Meanwhile, women who refuse to be submissive can be subjected to abuse or disciplinary actions from their husbands. Studies also find that some women, specifically Christians women,

who stay or return to abusive relationships use religious doctrines to justify their decisions and explain their husbands' behaviours. They have been taught to value the sanctity of marriage; they believe "God hates divorce," so they do everything possible to preserve their marriage.

Almost all my participants were Muslims; only two were Christians. It is important to consider religious background, however, because women's decisions, values, and beliefs are likely to be influenced by it, either directly or indirectly and forms of marriage can differ according to religious tradition.

## **1.5. Conclusion**

This chapter has given a brief explanation of child marriage and intimate partner violence from a global and Ghanaian perspective. It provides the rationale for the study and the research questions it explored. I also review the literature on child marriage and intimate partner violence, looking closely at feminist understandings. Briefly stated, women who marry below age 18 are more susceptible to all forms of IPV for several reasons: the age gap between husbands and child brides, low socioeconomic status, low or no education, cultural norms, and gender roles placing men above women. In the next chapter, I give an overview of the feminist perspective guiding the dissertation. In addition, I describe the study location and methods employed to gather data.

## CHAPTER 2

### METHODOLOGY

*It is clear that despite the pressure to remain within positivist conventions, feminist researchers in the region have sought to give voice to women through methods that allow and encourage the articulation of previously unavailable narratives – storytelling, oral histories, biographies and life stories reflect growing awareness of the limits of the androcentric archive and the colonial and postcolonial information systems that have silenced women and suppressed their perspectives (Amina Mama, 2011, p. 13).*

#### **2.0: Introduction**

Ackerly and True define a feminist methodological approach as a “commitment to continually reviewing and challenging notions of what are appropriate and reliable ways of knowing and understanding the world, in particular by reflecting on the different ways they appear from the standpoint of different individuals and social groups” (2010, p. 25). The driving force behind much feminist research is gender inequality, such as hegemonic masculinity in society. Within this larger theoretical framework, some researchers seek to understand the experience of women and other vulnerable groups from their perspective (Doucet & Mauthner, 2006; Wickramasinghe, 2010; Kasper, 1994). As a researcher, I use a feminist qualitative methodological approach to examine the knowledge, understanding, and opinions of Ghanaian women who married as children of child marriage, IPV, and their lived IPV experiences. In so

doing, I seek to make “diverse women's voices and experiences heard” (Ramazanoglu and Holland, 2002, p.15) to achieve social, political and economic justice (Doucet & Mauthner, 2006; Kasper, 1994).

Doucet and Mauthner note that “feminist research should not just be on women, but for women and, where possible, with women” (2006, p. 40). To actualize this, feminist researchers must speak and work with women. They must also create a balanced power relationship with their respondents by “developing non-hierarchical and ‘friendly’ relationships” (Doucet & Mauthner, 2006, p. 40; Campbell et al., 2010). Heeding this call, I established rapport with my respondents by creating an emotionally supportive and empathetic environment for them to freely express themselves (Bryman & Bell, 2016; Campbell et al., 2010). I also “let them see into my world, both personally and professionally” (Campbell et al., 2010, p.73) by answering all questions on my personal and professional involvement in the project. For example, before and after each interview, participants were allowed to ask questions or seek clarifications on issues about the study they did not understand.

A feminist approach embraces reflexivity, especially as researchers can never separate their “positionality” from the research process and outcome or knowledge production (Doucet & Mauthner, 2006; Wickramasinghe, 2010; Ramazanoglu and Holland, 2002). Reflexivity, according to Berger, is “the process of a continual internal dialogue and critical self-evaluation of researcher’s positionality as well as active acknowledgment and explicit recognition, that this position may affect the research process and outcome” (Berger, 2015, p. 220). Berger’s definition is in line with Doucet and Mauthner's assertion that a researcher’s subjectivity (personal feelings, emotions, opinions or beliefs, values) can become entwined in the lives of the researched (Doucet and Mauthner, 2006, p. 41). For this reason, while I positioned myself as a

female gender advocate and researcher, “the privileged” (Doucet & Mauthner, 2006, p.42), and attempted to create a friendly and non-hierarchical environment, I was reflexive at all stages of the research process, especially during the data collection and data analysis stage. For instance, I acknowledged that my position as a female and gender activist researching child marriage and IPV could influence my interpretation/analysis of my findings. I strove to be as objective as possible in representing my respondents’ views. For this reason, I practiced reflexivity to ensure that the subjective views and experience of child brides met with minimum interference from my background.

All researchers approach their work with unique perspectives or personal values, and these might influence their objectivity. As a student of gender studies, a gender advocate, and a woman, I believe no one should be abused or discriminated against based on sex or gender. However, child marriage and IPV are gender-based issues that affect women, and I too could become a victim. Therefore, I was likely more sympathetic and empathetic to respondents’ situation and experiences as they narrated their stories. Because I was aware of this likelihood, I was reflexive while paying attention to these stories, so that my emotions, assumptions, and prejudices would not influence our interactions.

Berger notes how the position of the researcher can affect the research process and shape the nature of the relationship between the researcher and the researched, as well as the kind of knowledge produced (Berger, 2015, p.220). I had a unique insider/outsider status. As a Ghanaian female, I had insider status; this gave me access to the Ghanaian community and some insight into the life experiences of my participants. Similarly, being a female advocate and researching on women facilitated insider discussions and made these women more comfortable and willing

to share their life experiences. However, I was also an outsider by virtue of my position as a graduate student researcher from a Western institution.

Kedir and Admasachew say their positions as British-based Ethiopian researchers caused their respondents to view them as a “tabloid journalist and a highly paid expatriate” from Britain (2010, p.441). As a result, participants demanded a reward for their participation, and this could not be accommodated for ethical reasons. I found myself in a similar situation during the recruitment stage. When I disclosed my identity (Canadian-based Ghanaian graduate student researcher) and intentions to respondents, they inquired whether money would be provided for the time spent since they assumed it was an NGO-sponsored project. While some agreed to take part in the study, others declined after learning that there was no monetary incentive.

In the subsequent sections of this chapter, I discuss the methods employed in the research. I begin with background details on the region where data were collected. This is followed by a discussion of the sampling technique, data collection tools, the transcription process and the language used in this study. Finally, I discuss the data analysis process and the ethical considerations of the study.

## **2.1. Research Method and Design**

### **2.1.1. Background of Bawku West District of Ghana.**

Ghana is located in the Western part of Africa and shares a border with Togo to the east, La Cote d'Ivoire to the west, Burkina Faso to the north, and the Gulf of Guinea, to the south. The country has an estimated total land area of 238,500 square kilometres. According to the 2010 population and housing census, Ghana's population is approximately 25 million (24,658,823), with 12,024,845 males and 12,633,978 females (Ghana Statistical Service (GSS), 2012). The



country is divided into 16 administrative regions, with about 100 ethnic groups,<sup>3</sup> each with its own exclusive local dialect. These regions are further divided into 216 districts/municipals and six metropolitan areas (GSS, 2012).

The study was conducted in Bawku West district, specifically Zebilla in the Upper East Region. The district covers an area of approximately 1,070 square kilometres and comprises about 12 percent of the total land area of the Upper East Region (GSS, 2014). It is bounded by Burkina Faso to the north, Bawku Municipality to the east, Talensi District to the west, and East Mamprusi District to the south. According to the 2010 census, Bawku West district has an estimated population of 94,034 (45,114 males, 48,920 females), representing 9.0 percent of the region's total population. Among this populace, the Kusasis form the majority ethnic group. This is followed by other ethnic groups: Frafras, Kasenas, Mamprusis, Moshies, Busangas, and Fulanis. Although the population in Bawku West district consists mostly of Northern ethnic groups, migrants from other ethnic groups reside in the community. These migrants constitute about 9,098 of the total population in the district, and they are there for various social and economic reasons. For instance, the Ewes are settler fishermen along the White Volta at Zongoyiri.

Although Zebilla has modern buildings, the majority of the people live in compound houses, built with mud and thatched or zinc roofs. GSS (2014) estimates the average household size to be 6.1, but higher in the rural areas (6.3) than urban areas (4.8). Bawku West has a postal and telecommunication system, police stations and a number of public and private health

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<sup>3</sup> The five major ethnic groups in Ghana are the Akan, Ewe, Mole-Dagbane, Guan, and Ga-Adangbe. The Akan ethnic group is made up of people from Central, Western, Ashanti and Brong Ahafo regions, Eastern Region; the Mole-Dagbon people are found in the three Northern Regions of Ghana; the Guans are in the Northern Volta, Guang, and Grusi; the Ga-Dangmes occupy the coastal, Greater Accra and Eastern regions; and the Ewes are mainly in the Volta Region. These groups are further subdivided into groups with a common cultural heritage, history, and origin.

facilities which supply the health, security, and communication needs of the inhabitants. The population predominantly follows traditional African religion (44 percent), while 35.0 percent are Christian, and 18.0 percent are Muslim.

About 90.8 percent of the population is rural, and the economy is predominantly agricultural (GSS, 2014; Bawku West District Assembly, 2015). Almost 80 percent of the active population obtains an income and livelihood from agricultural activities (GSS, 2014). These include farming (crops, livestock and fishing) and agriculture-related activities (pito brewing<sup>4</sup>, shea butter extraction, groundnut oil extraction, malt production, rice processing, dawadawa processing, charcoal burning, weaving, pottery etc.). Women play a significant role in planting, harvesting, storage, and marketing of these farm products (GSS, 2014). However, despite their active role in the socio-economic lives of people in the district, women have little access to productive resources and credits, and this impedes the expansion of their economic activities (GSS, 2014). In addition to working on the farms, women do all the domestic chores and take care of their children.

More females (82.7 percent) than males (72.3 percent) in the district have never been to school (UNDP, 2011). Although a larger percentage of females is enrolled in the districts' primary schools than males (80.1 percent and 70.6 percent, respectively), as they move higher in education, females have a higher drop-out rate than males (GSS, 2014; UNDP, 2011). The high drop-out rate and women's lower educational attainment is a common phenomenon, caused by poverty, some religious beliefs, and other cultural practices (UNDP, 2011).

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<sup>4</sup> Pito is a locally brewed beer made from fermented millet or sorghum. This type of beer is usually found in the Northern part of Ghana. Most traditional drinkers prefer having it in a calabash (Zaukuu, Oduro & Ellis, 2016).

The traditional marriage practice in the Bawku West district, in fact, in all of the Northern region of Ghana, requires the bridegroom's family to pay a dowry, from two to four cows, to the bride's family (GSS, 2014). This system encourages families to marry their female children off at an early stage, especially if the family is experiencing financial difficulties. These cows could be sold to offset the family's immediate financial needs or used as a source of food. A UNDP report (2011) indicates that more than 93 percent of the district's population has difficulty satisfying the household's food needs. It is therefore not surprising that child marriage is more rampant in this area than elsewhere in Ghana: 39 percent of women marry before the age of 18 (GSS, 2011; UNICEF, 2015). The 2010 population and housing census finds almost half (52.2 percent) of the population aged 12 years and older are married. This combination of factors made the Bawku West district an obvious choice for my study.

In the northern part of Ghana, including Bawku West, a patrilineal system of inheritance is practiced. Male children inherit the family property after the death of their father, while female children are denied the right to inherit/own properties. This gender difference in inheritance plays an integral part in the high incidence of poverty among women and women's dependency on men for economic survival, as well as their experience of IPV (GSS, 2014; Sedziafa et al., 2016). Children born into couples within the patrilineal system of inheritance belong to their father's kin not their mother's. Thus, a woman's children become members of her husband's patrilineal line: put otherwise, the children belong to the father, not the mother. During my interviews with respondents, I realized that this system of patrilineal inheritance caused women to stay in an abusive relationship; they quite rightly feared their children would be taken away from them should they decide to leave.

### **2.1.2. Sampling technique**

I used purposive sampling to select respondents and the study area (Atkinson & Flint, 2001; Palinkas, 2015; Warren & Karner, 2015). The Upper East region, specifically Bawku West, was purposively selected because the region records the highest prevalence of child marriage in Ghana. In addition, the communities contain people with various socio-economic and demographic backgrounds, so selecting ever-married women who married before 18 years gave me access to a diverse population of women, including but not limited to low/high/middle-income earners, educated/uneducated women, age, religion etc. This sampling technique permitted the selection and engagement of diverse and knowledgeable female participants who provided rich information on my topic (Palinkas, Horwitz, Green, Wisdom, Duan, & Hoagwood, 2015).

In recruiting participants, I recalled some who had participated in a recent SSHRC-funded project by Dr. Eric Tenkorang, “Examining the help-seeking behaviours of female victims of intimate partner violence in Ghana.” The project examined the help-seeking behaviours of female IPV victims in Ghana (Coastal, Middle, and Northern). It also explored the avenues available for victims of IPV to report abuse and seek help and the socioeconomic and demographic differences between those who seek help and those who do not. It attempted to determine whether the nature or type of violence experienced determines where women seek help and the socio-cultural barriers that prevent women from reporting IPV. Dr. Tenkorang’s project combined quantitative and qualitative methods. Preliminary results show that among the over 2,289 ever-married female IPV victims interviewed, about 9.3 percent married before age 18.

Dr. Tenkorang agreed to work with me by giving the relevant participants my contact information and recruitment letter so they could contact me if interested in the study. When participants contacted me, I explained my research intentions. A suitable day, time, and place was arranged with those who consented. According to Ellard-Gray et al. (2015), one of the difficulties researchers encounter when conducting research with hard-to-reach and vulnerable populations is identifying potential respondents within a population. However, situating my work within Dr. Tenkorang's project gave me an already identified population with an established rapport. In addition, most victims of IPV find it difficult to report/disclose their experiences; Dr. Tenkorang had already promised anonymity and confidentiality to respondents during his project. Knowing this and understanding that my study observed the same ethical principles, participants in my study were able to freely express themselves.

The qualitative researcher uses non-random sampling techniques to sample small groups of people for in-depth knowledge (Mason, 2010; Warren & Karner, 2015). In-depth interviews permit them to make a systematic inquiry into social phenomena and to make sense of the meaning respondents attach to their social world, including "their relationships, groups, organizations, communities, or subculture" (Warren & Karner, 2015). Researchers differ on the preferred number of respondents to interview (Warren & Karner, 2015; Mason, 2010; Charmaz, 2006), but are generally advised not to stick to a predefined sample size but to be flexible until data saturation is reached (Fusch & Ness, 2015; Mason, 2010; Warren & Karner, 2015). At this point, the researcher has obtained "enough information to replicate the study" (Fusch & Ness, 2015, p.1408) and conducting further interviews adds no substantial information. For example, in researching intimate partner violence among women married as children in Lahore, Pakistan, Nasrullah et al. (2015) reached saturation after the 19th interview, even though they initially

planned to interview 23 participants identified by NGO representatives. Even though I initially proposed to interview 20 respondents, I noticed data saturation at the 15th interview. This small sample size enabled me to create good interviewer-interviewee relationships and to gather adequate information from respondents, taking into consideration time and resource availability.

### **2.1.3. Data collection procedure.**

A suitable day, time, and place was arranged with those who consented to the study during the recruitment stage. I emphasized participants' "choice, power, and control" throughout the recruitment process (Campbell et al., 2010, p.72). I ensured both verbally and in writing that participants knew they had the choice to participate or opt out of the study without coercion. One-on-one interviews were scheduled a day apart to reduce the stress of interview on both the researcher and the researched, as this could negatively influence the data collection and research outcomes. However, on a few occasions, I conducted two interviews in one day because of changes in respondents' schedule and proximity.

I used qualitative in-depth or intensive interviews as a data collection tool. In-depth interviewing, according to Boyce and Neale, is a "qualitative research technique that involves conducting intensive individual interviews with a small number of respondents to explore their perspectives on a particular idea, program, or situation" (2006, p. 3). This data collection tool thoroughly engages participants in the research process by exploring the individual meaning they attach to issues of their everyday life experiences (Rosaline, 2008; Warren & Karner, 2015; Nasrullah et al. 2015), making it suitable for my study. In the longer term, exploring subjective understandings of issues of child marriage and IPV could help tailor effective interventions. Another advantage of this type of research was that conducting intensive individual interviews

ensured privacy and enabled my participants to freely discuss their IPV and marriage experiences without fear.

Before going into the field, I designed a semi-structured interview guide, with the intention of empowering respondents to share their experiences. The guide was based on four themes: demographic/socioeconomic background; knowledge and experience of child marriage; knowledge of and perspectives on intimate partner violence/domestic violence; and power differential in child marriages. Semi-structured interview guides are flexible and adaptive; they allow the researcher to probe participants and to adjust his/her research questions (Bryman & Bell, 2016; Rosaline, 2008). The semi-structured approach to asking questions allowed participants to provide more direction in the interview, giving deeper insight into my research questions. As Strauss and Corbin (2008) note, adhering rigidly to initial guidelines or an interview schedule could hinder the discovery of new themes; interviews with unstructured guidelines give room for themes to emerge from the data. I modified some of the questions in the interview guide/schedule as and when new themes/information emerged. For example, after a few interviews, I observed that respondents were providing similar answers to the question on whether a man can discipline his partner and if that is classified as intimate partner violence. Others even used the term “IPV and discipline” interchangeably. Therefore, as the interviews proceeded, I modified the questions to distinguish the terms. I also modified the question “does socialization influence your perception and experiences of IPV as a woman” to “does one’s socialization process influence abuse in marriages?”

Each interview lasted 30 - 60 minutes. At the beginning of each interview, I briefly introduced respondents to the objectives of the study and read through the consent form to ensure they knew their rights and responsibilities as respondents, as well as those of the researcher. I

obtained oral or written informed consent from respondents before beginning the interview. I audio recorded all oral consent. All interviews were recorded and later transcribed verbatim by the researcher. To ensure transcription quality, I replayed the audio recordings several times to confirm the transcripts clearly reflected the audio recordings.

The interviewing was not without challenges as the interviews were sometimes interrupted by the daily routine and priorities of participants (see McNulty, 2012, for a similar experience). These interruptions affected the interview process. An example is an interviewee who agreed for the interview to be conducted in her “provision” store. The interview was disrupted by both her young children, including a one-year-old baby she had to breastfeed, and customers she had to serve. At times, scheduled interviews had to be canceled and rescheduled due to heavy rains, as it was rainy season at the time of data collection.

#### **2.1.4. Language and transcription**

English is a global research language used to communicate research outcomes, but researchers are advised to conduct interviews in a language used and understood by participants. Ghana is a multilingual country with about 50 Ghanaian languages (Arthur-Shoba & Quarcoo, 2012). Interviews for this study were conducted in Twi and English according to the respondent’s language preference. This choice was informed by the fact that more than half of the Ghanaian population is fluent in or at least understands both languages. English is the official language and is the language of instruction in all educational institutions and government agencies (Arthur-Shoba & Quarcoo, 2012), while Twi is widely spoken and is used by the media, advertising companies, and government agencies in various campaigns (Arthur-Shoba & Quarcoo, 2012).



Language represents how people perceive, understand, interpret, construct, and express their social world and lived experiences or life stories. For this reason, cross-language researchers are advised to pay specific attention to the translation process, as this can impact the study outcome (Smith, Chen, & Liu, 2008; Santos, Black & Sandelowski, 2015; Temple & Young, 2004; Van Nes, Abma, Jonsson & Deeg, 2010). For instance, meanings could be misrepresented or misunderstood, especially in instances when local words have more than one linguistic meaning and expression in English (Santos et al. 2015; Smith et al., 2008; Van Nes et al., 2010). It is important to note that misrepresentation could inhibit my goal of giving women a voice to share their experiences and stories from their own standpoint. To curb misrepresentation, I translated the interviews; I am fluent in Twi and English, and my knowledge of the research topic helped the process.

Santos et al. (2015) caution researchers to make clear the timing of translation, as many do not explicitly state when translation was introduced in the research. They point out five key times when translation can occur in cross-language research, from the source language (Twi, in this case) to the target language (English): before data collection, during data collection, during data preparation, during data analysis, and during the dissemination of results (Santos et al., 2015, p. 135).

Translation was introduced into this study before data collection and during the data preparation stage. Because it is sometimes difficult to find some of the Twi alphabets on a computer or a laptop keyboard, I had to translate the Twi interviews into English to facilitate typing. Translating the interviews into English also helped me to analyze the data and present results in the required academic language of my university (English). Before going to the field to collect data, I discussed the interview questions with an experienced female Twi teacher in

Kumasi. This was done to find appropriate words or expressions in the Twi language to communicate the interview questions to participants without imposing my understanding on them. For example, we both agreed on Twi words like “ɔhaw”, “ayakayakadee” “ayayade” or “ateetee”, which, based on the context, can be used to describe violence, abuse, harassment, treating someone harshly, or making someone unhappy. These were used interchangeably to mean violence during the interviews. But during data transcription, I used English words that could best describe the participant’s expression in Twi.

### **2.1.5. Data analysis**

After data collection and transcription, Strauss and Corbin (2008) advise researchers to immediately proceed with data analysis. I analysed the data using thematic content analysis. Braun and Clarke (2006) describe thematic analysis as a way to analyze qualitative data by identifying patterns or themes within interview data. For the analysis, I used QDA Miner, a computer-assisted qualitative research analysis software developed by Prevalis Research. This software enables qualitative researchers to code, annotate, retrieve, and analyze small and large collections of documents, interviews, and images.

During data analysis, I initially read and re-read the interview transcripts several times and made notes about my initial impressions of the data. This stage is very significant as it helps the researcher to become “intimately” familiar with the interview data (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Warren & Karner, 2015, p. 212). In the next stage of the analytical process, I developed initial codes from the data. Warren and Karner (2015) refer to this process as open coding; it comprises the discovery of themes, patterns, and concepts from the raw interview transcripts (Warren & Karner, 2015). During the coding process, I organized the data into meaningful and systematic groups. At this stage, researchers are advised to be “open” and code as many emerging themes

and concepts from the data to avoid missing anything important or interesting later in the analysis process. For this reason, I was open to all possible themes and codes emerging from the data at this stage.

Coding during thematic data analysis was done in two ways: inductively from the raw interview transcripts and deductively from interview questions and the literature. For instance, when a respondent indicated that she married early because of poverty or financial hardship in the family which prevented her from pursuing higher education, I created the code poverty or financial hardship. I highlighted all sentences and phrases in the transcript pointing to poverty or hardship and included them under this code. The literature shows that women who marry as children are susceptible to physical, verbal or emotional, sexual and economic violence and/or abuse; therefore, I created codes for physical abuse, emotional abuse, sexual abuse, and economic abuse.

These codes resulted in a coding book that I used to code other transcripts. As the analysis progressed, new codes developed and were included in the coding book. Subsequently, these codes were categorized, merged, and grouped under major themes in accordance with the research questions. The themes also emerged in the interview transcripts and the interview questions. For instance, based on the interview questions on the IPV experiences of Ghanaian women who married before 18 years, I created a major theme or category, “forms or types of IPV experiences,” and responses corresponding to this category were grouped together.

Quantitative researchers often question the reliability and validity of qualitative findings based on the small sample size, and Creswell and Miller (2000) advise qualitative researchers to follow certain procedures to check the credibility of their findings. One procedure is member checking. In member checking, data and interpretations are made available to participants so

they can confirm accuracy and consistency. In my case, I contacted one of the participants and reviewed her transcripts with her to verify if they accurately reflected her responses.

#### **2.1.6. Ethical considerations.**

I first obtained ethics approval from the Interdisciplinary Committee on Ethics in Human Research (ICEHR) at Memorial University, because this study involved human subjects.

Obtaining participants' informed consent before the commencement of this study is essential to the research process, and I strictly adhered to this rule. Before each interview, I explained to participants the purpose of the study and disclosed my identity and affiliations in Twi or English. I also explained to participants there would be no remuneration for participating, but participants were advised of the potential benefits of this research to policymakers and to themselves. Participants were informed that participation was voluntary, and they were free to withdraw consent without any coercion. I consistently applied the principle of respecting participants' autonomy, emphasizing their "choice, power, and control" throughout the interview process (Campbell et al., 2010, p.72). I explained to participants that they could skip or refuse any question they did not want to answer and end the interview at any time if they felt distressed or uncomfortable. I stressed their ability to discontinue the study after they had completed the interviews. I provided my contact information in case they wanted to get in touch to withdraw at a later period. Participants were urged to communicate this to me within no more than two months after data collection if they wanted to discontinue. In such cases, all data and information would be deleted and destroyed to protect their power to choose to consent. However, I cautioned participants that if I did not hear from them within two months of data collection, and results were published, I would not be able to erase their data.

Because most of these women had little or no education, they were given the opportunity to provide either written or oral consent in either Twi or English. The written consent forms were secured in my locker cabinet at home while in Ghana and when I returned to Canada. The voice recording of informed consent was secured on my password-protected laptop. Copies were also stored on an external hard drive and kept in a secured location as a back up at my house in Canada. This action was to protect each participant's anonymity and privacy.

I recognized that interviewing participants on such a sensitive topic might trigger some emotional discomfort or stress as they were likely to remember painful experiences. However, Ellsberg et al. (2005) argue that although asking women to share their lived experiences can be traumatic, the exercise often serves as an intervention/healing process. As Herman (cited in Ellsberg et al., 2005) notes, "Remembering and telling the truth about terrible events are prerequisites both for the restoration of the social order and for the healing of individual victims." (p.43). But even though such discomfort might be ultimately beneficial, I had measures in place to provide emotional support. Since Dr. Tenkorang's larger project had support from, and established contact with trained counsellors from the Domestic Violence and Victim Support Unit (DOVVSU), I was prepared to refer participants to them as needed.

Ellsberg et al. (2005) observe that researching on issues of violence against women has the potential of causing harm to both the participants and the researcher, especially if the abusers become knowledgeable about their partner's involvement. Consequently, interviews were not held in the homes of participants to prevent interruptions and reduce the fear of expression. After participants expressed interest in taking part, we reached an agreement on the appropriate location and a convenient time for the interview. I sometimes conducted interviews with participants in a store or a comfortable place at the market according to participants' discretion.

These measures were to protect participants' confidential information, privacy, and safety, and minimize the research risk to myself and my respondents.

I also followed the World Health Organization's guidelines<sup>5</sup> for conducting research on domestic violence and minimizing the risk of interviews to participants. I interviewed only one woman per household and provided detailed information about the nature of the study to only recruited participants (Ellsberg et al., 2005).

To ensure respondents' anonymity, privacy, and confidentiality, I removed all identifying information and used pseudonyms to make sure that the information appearing in reports, presentations, and publications cannot be traced back to the women interviewed.

## **2.2. Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have described the feminist methods guiding the study and highlighted the reasons for employing a feminist qualitative method. I provide a general background and description of the study area—Bawku West. I also discuss the sampling techniques, the data collection tool, translation procedure, and the method of data analysis. I conclude the chapter with a summary of the ethical considerations. The next chapter presents the findings.

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<sup>5</sup> The WHO's guideline for conducting research on violence against women, including domestic violence provides practical methodological and ethical guidelines for researchers to follow in situations where they are faced with any challenges while conducting research on violence against women. It as well gives a description of various modern ways of addressing these challenges in order to minimize the risk of research to both the interviewer and interviewee (Ellsberg et al., 2005).

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **RESULTS**

#### **3.0. Introduction**

This chapter presents the results of my interviews with 15 Ghanaian women from the Upper East region or Bawku who had married before the age of 18. The major themes that emerged were: women's knowledge of child marriage; factors contributing to child marriage; women's understanding of IPV; types of IPV experiences; factors influencing IPV in child marriages; responses to abuse and the effect of abuse. Before discussing the women's perspectives, I first explain their demographic socioeconomic and religious background. Although I use direct quotations from the interview transcripts, all identifying markers are removed, and pseudonyms are used to ensure anonymity and privacy.

#### **3.1. Demographic and socioeconomic background**

Respondents in this study were between the ages of 19 and 45 years at the time of the interview. All women were married, were in a polygynous relationship, and reported marrying between the ages of 13 and 16 years. Only five had formal education (primary and junior high level). Participants were predominately Muslim; two were Christian. Two respondents said they converted from Christianity to Islam upon marriage.

All 15 respondents were employed, but in the informal sector. They were self-employed petty traders, dress-makers, hairdressers/stylists, head porters, and food sellers, including market produce like onions, tomatoes, okra, pepper etc. Others were engaged in shea nut picking and

processing, dawadawa<sup>6</sup> processing, groundnut oil extraction, charcoal burning, pito brewing, and selling firewood. Since these women had control of their work time, on average, they worked 12 hours per day, far above the minimum eight hours stipulated by Ghana's labour law (Osei-Boateng & Ampratwum, 2011). US studies find most people who work in the informal sector earn below the official national daily minimum wage of US\$ 2.66, which is equivalent to GH¢13.3 (Otoo et al., 2009; Osei-Boateng & Ampratwum, 2011). Income from these economic activities allows women to support their family and to afford staple food items like beans, millet, groundnuts, cowpeas, rice, shea nuts etc. One of my respondents said: "Me like this, I pay for my children's school fees, and even common uniform, I have to buy for them myself, and I am able to do so from my earnings from the cloths I sell at the market" (Jane, 27 years old).

Besides working to support the family, the women did all the domestic chores and took care of their children and extended family members in the household. All 15 women lived with their husbands' extended family members in the same household. Ghana Statistical Service (2014) estimates the average household size in Bawku West at 6.3 persons.

### **3.2. Emerging Themes**

#### **3.2.1. Knowledge of child marriage**

In general, all participants had some knowledge of child marriage. They identified it as any form of marriage involving a child who is not mentally and physically mature and is not prepared to handle marital responsibilities. For instance, Anna described child marriage as "a situation where one has not reached the age of marriage, and not yet matured/ ready to handle the responsibilities in marriage including performing all the duties expected of a wife" (Anna, 20

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<sup>6</sup> It's an African fermented dried seed of the African locust bean usually pressed into balls and used as spices for food.



years old). These wifely duties include managing a home, cooking, and satisfying the sexual desires of one's partner. One participant recalled: "It was not all that easy because when I married at that age [16], you see, I was not mentally and physically matured to do everything in the house, but I was required to do everything, which was not easy for me" (Jane, 27 years old). Another participant noted that when she was given out in marriage at an early age, she did not have the physical strength to prepare food for the entire house, as required of her as a wife. As tradition demands, the duties of a wife include the husband's family as a whole. Domestic work is shared among wives irrespective of their age. Lan said she was required to prepare "tuozaafi" (a local dish which involves the stirring of a dough to make a stiff paste) for every family member in the house when she was only 15. The difficult task sometimes triggered psychological and verbal abuse from in-laws when they felt lumps in the food.

Participants were explicit: child marriages are forced marriages where family members make arrangements for marriage without involving them. A girl child is made to marry a man for whom she has no intimate feelings prior to marriage. For example, one participant explained: "I felt I was not matured enough to marry but was made to marry early based on my aunt's demand that I should marry her husband since she is getting older" (Mimi, 34 years old).

### **3.2.2. Factors influencing child marriage in northern Ghana.**

#### *a) Poverty or financial hardship*

All participants identified poverty as a major reason for child marriages in Northern Ghana. This was not surprising as the region is the poorest in Ghana. When asked what made her marry early, Mina said, "Hmm..... it is the hardship, here we experience immense poverty" (Mina, 24 years old). Poor economic conditions make it difficult for parents to provide for the family. This

compels many families to marry off their girls. Upon marriage, cattle are received as a bride price, and according to the women, they are sold to cater to the economic needs of the family or to leverage the family debt. Anna said:

In my case, I was given out in marriage at an early age because of poverty and hunger, this place is not like the south [of Ghana]. Due to the poverty and hunger it was difficult for my family to feed, so they thought if I marry early, my husband to-be will give them cows as part of the bride price — cows are usually given to the woman's family during the traditional marriage rites. The intent was to sell these cows and use the income to buy food for the family and cater for my younger ones. (Anna, 20 years old)

Anita described how, in her case, the family used marriage to solve their financial problems during an emergency:

For me, my dad was sick in Kumasi and they needed money to transport him to Bawku but there was no money, as a result I was asked to marry someone, which I refused. So, they brought me back to marry my current husband. Even though I was not ready to marry him, I did due to my father's sickness because cows will be collected from the man as my bride price and sold to get money and bring the sick person [father] to Bawku. (Anita, 45 years old)

Although parents believed marrying a girl child off was the easiest way to deal with financial difficulties, Anna noted that this was not always the case, since some husbands were equally poor and unable to care for the girl's family as expected. She said:

I had younger siblings and my parents thought that, if I married early, the man could help cater for me and my younger ones; but truthfully, their desire were not met after entering

into the marriage arrangement since my husband and I, as a nuclear family, were also experiencing some financial difficulties. This made it impossible for my husband to extend help to my extended family as expected. (Anna, 20 years old)

b) *Low levels of education*

Poverty and the lack of support for female education lead most girls in the area to drop out of school. Families who cannot afford school fees and other educational needs prefer to allocate their limited resources to educate the male child because of the belief that male children have greater earning potential in adulthood. Girls who cannot continue their education are pushed into early marriage. Mina said:

Yeah, I was in school, but had to stop because my family was poor, even what to eat to enable you study was a problem plus I couldn't even buy a pen or any book. This compelled me to stop schooling and rather learn a vocation. But even with that, I was inconsistent since I had to work alongside learning the vocation, in order to earn an income. I usually sell water on market days to gather some money for the apprenticeship the next day: I use two days to learn a vocation and three days to sell water. Upon realizing I was ineffective in both spheres, I convinced myself that those who are not up to my age are getting married and doing well, so if I also marry, maybe the man will also support me. (Mina, 24 years old)

Although Mina willingly entered into marriage, other respondents lamented that they were forced to marry after dropping out of school. A case in point is Yaa who said: "I was schooling but there was no money to continue and since I was a woman, my father asked me to stop and get married. Even at that age, another family was already coming to my house to

express an interest in marrying me, so my father agreed to give my hand in marriage” (Yaa, 20 years old).

The interviews also revealed that the absence of any form of education for girls and the lack of meaningful and economically attractive employment pushes parents to give out a girl child to early marriage to ensure she avoids promiscuity. One participant explained: “When one is a child and does not attend school, does not work or have any vocation, and her parents don’t have money to cater for her, she is pushed into marrying early so she does not live a promiscuous life or get pregnant which will bring shame and dishonor to the family” (Tiwaa, 20 years old).

c) *Teenage pregnancy*

Women who marry early are likely to give birth early. However, teenage pregnancy also predisposes the girl child to early marriage. Participants noted that in a rural community like theirs, poverty is acute, and most parents cannot afford to provide for their family. Girls become vulnerable to men’s sexual advances, especially when these men are able to provide their basic needs (food, dress, money, etc.). They succumb to the sexual demands, and this often leads to pregnancy. In Ghana, using a condom or other contraceptives is misconstrued as infidelity and lack of commitment to a relationship; hence, they are seldom used. Participants indicated that when an unmarried girl becomes pregnant, she is made to marry the man who impregnated her, irrespective of her age, to avoid family shame and societal ridicule. For instance, Maame said:

Yes..... it is a taboo for the Busanga [an ethnic group in Ghana] people, a girl child can’t get pregnant out of wedlock and give birth in her family house. So, if you become pregnant, you will be given to the boy/man who impregnated you, so you can deliver your child in your matrimonial home. Even if you are in courtship with a guy and your

family believe that you are at an age whereby you can become pregnant, they will give you out in marriage because the family fears to be disgraced and humiliated. Yeah, even when they get to know that you are having sexual intercourse with a man, they won't allow you to stay in the house again. It's a taboo. (Maame, 45 years old)

Similarly, Jane recounted how she became pregnant as a child:

For me, my father left me under the care of my grand mum. My mum divorced my father, so I was alone with my grandmother who was poor and couldn't afford to provide my needs. So, when someone says you are beautiful and gives you something [money or food], you take it because you don't have and cannot provide for yourself, but these gifts are not for free, you will pay for them with what you have, your body. Due to this lifestyle, I was pregnant before I completed JHS 3 [grade 9]. That was why I was given out in marriage. (Jane, 27 years old)

#### *d) Cultural and traditional practices*

Participants' responses indicated that a family's desire to cement and maintain long-lasting friendships and ties with other families can influence the decision to betroth or give their daughters in marriage. Participants noted that making a promise to another family to give a daughter's hand in marriage is a common practice. More importantly, although this promise could be verbal, the agreement cannot be terminated even if the person who made the promise is dead; the promise must be fulfilled at all cost. One participant said: "At this place, the moment you make a promise to give your child to someone, it must be fulfilled even when the person is dead" (Akua, 20 years old). Fathers are further encouraged by the fact that besides the bride

price, the future husbands will help them on their farms and provide free produce from their own farms before and after marrying their daughter. Akua noted:

You see our place is not like the south, here if your dad's best friend has a male child, they can decide to arrange a marriage between the two families based on a promise made to each other. Hmm, you see how we do things in our town, so the boy often comes to help my dad at the farm to work and do other chores for my dad, with the assurance that he promised his family to give him a woman to marry, that is when his daughter gets old. So, after my dad made the promise to the man, I left the town to stay with someone in Kumasi as a domestic help. But not long after staying in Kumasi my sister-in-law died and I had to come for the funeral in my hometown. After the funeral, the guy and his family came for me to their house the next day [this was because my absence in the community was a threat to the contract]. Yeah, you see how we do things here? So, when they left with me, the boy's family came to my dad to perform the marriage rite. My dad insisted I was not of age and that the terms of the contract was "when she is of age". But they responded that they will train and cater for me the same way he would until I come of age, but this was not what happened after the marital rite. (Akua, 20 years old)

Another participant, Lan, spoke of how she was made to marry early to fulfil her grandfather's promise to another man:

Yes, the reason why I was given out to marriage early is that, my grandfather had promised someone that he will give him a wife. But at that time all my sisters were married, except me. I was told that since my grandfather had already promised the man a wife, if am also allowed to marry a man of my choice, there will be no other woman in

the family to fulfill that promise to the man, so I must be given to that man. (Lan, 33 years old)

Lan added that although her grandfather's promise was to be fulfilled when she came of age, other cultural circumstances propelled her family to give her out in marriage at an earlier age. Culturally, if a male member of a family seeks to marry but is financially unable to provide the bride price demanded by the bride's family, his sister is given in marriage (irrespective of age) and the bride price paid for his sister is used to offset the bride price required by his in-laws. This cultural practice caused Lan to be married although she had not come of age. Lan explained the situation as follows:

My brother was also going to marry another woman, and the lady's family members demanded cows as the pride price. So, because my father didn't have the cow or money to buy the cow demanded by my brother's in-laws, he decided that I should be married off to the man they had promised a wife so they can take the cows for my bride price and use it for my brother's dowry payment to his in-laws. (Lan, 33 years old)

Other participants mentioned other traditional reasons for their early marriage. One woman said an auntie can request a young female family member to marry her husband because of her inability to continue her wifely duties, such as childbearing to expand the family, working on the farm, or sexually satisfying the husband. Mimi said she found herself in such a situation while staying with her auntie; the aunt requested she marry her husband because she was too old to carry out her duties:

My parents are dead, so my aunty took care of me till she gave me out for marriage. What actually happened was that, my aunty was married to the man but gave me out to him

when she became old and couldn't satisfy him. Yes..... as for our hometown, that's the way things are. As I sit here right now, I can go and bring my brother's child to replace me at a point where I can't continue my wifely duties to the man [husband] again. (Mimi, married at the age of 15)

Akos remarked that in her case, because it is traditionally acceptable for two sisters to marry one man, her father married her to her senior sister's husband: "My father gave me as an addition to my senior sister. My senior sister was married to the man who is now my husband too. Yeah, here that's our culture you can be given in marriage to your sister's husband too" (Akos, 25 years old). When asked why her father made that decision, she explained that it was to get cows to sell to cover the family's financial needs.

### **3.2.3. Women's understanding of intimate partner violence/abuse.**

Almost all participants had some knowledge of IPV. For instance, when asked what she thought IPV was, Asiamah described it as mistreatment resulting from quarrels: "A misunderstanding or quarrels between couples which results in mistreatment, in the form of beating, slapping, insults, use of derogatory words, throwing something at you or withholding, economic support etc." (Asiamah, 45 years old). In responding to the same question, Mimi explained IPV as an act against the will of the husband that leads to physical abuse: "It's all about anger especially when you do what the man doesn't like, some women exchange words [insult] men and that causes the men to beat them (Mimi, 35 years old). Both women saw IPV as violent mistreatment caused by a wife disagreeing or arguing with a husband.

### **3.2.4. Women's IPV experiences**

#### *a) Physical abuse*



Almost all the women had experienced physical abuse. Most mentioned physical violence in the form of slapping, beating, pushing, and having things thrown at them. For instance, Akos noted: “Yeah, he slaps me, as for beating, he often beats me” (Akos, 25 years old). Some, including Asiamah, Tiwaa and Maame, thought that in some situations, they triggered the physical abuse, especially when they did things that their husbands did not like or approve of. Tiwaa recounted her own experience: “When he instructs me not to go to a particular house or associate myself with some friends and I go, he then gets angry and beats me. Yeah...this is because he does not like where you are going yet you disobeyed him” (Tiwaa, 19 years old). Another woman said: “Maybe if you do something wrong and he complains about your attitude, and you exchange words with him, he might hit [beat] you for disrespecting him” (Maame, 45 years old).

One participant, Asiamah considered the act to be wrong, but like the other women, she pointed to a woman’s culpability. When asked if it was acceptable for a husband to beat his wife, she said: “Well, it is not good for him to do that [hit you], but some women at times incited the beating because if you hadn’t done what you did, he also would not have done that. So, you must stop whatever you did wrong that resulted in him maltreating you” (Asiamah, 45 years old).

#### *b) Psychological/verbal abuse*

Respondents mentioned verbal or psychological abuse as a common experience in their relationship. All 15 participants had experienced a partner’s insults, humiliation, refusal to eat their food, or decisions not to talk with them as a way of punishing them for their wrongdoing. One woman said:

He usually gets angry and starts to insult me and that hurts me so much. I feel he doesn't like me, since almost every year he does that to me, he keeps using abusive words on me. If that happens, [I ] am not happy, [I ] am not able to have a peaceful conversation with my husband as I am supposed to and even when I sit to eat, I panic, and I am not able to enjoy the food. (Akos, 25 years old)

Another recounted how her husband insulted her when she made a small error in her cooking:

Let's say if [I] make small mistake with my cooking, which shouldn't have triggered any abuse, he starts to verbally abuse me (insult). Yeah, sometimes he insults me or say painful words like if he had known, he wouldn't have married me and that [I] am not a good woman, am useless or he identifies a spot on my body that's not nice and insult me with that which sometimes takes me months to forget. (Anna, 20 years old)

These abusive verbal or psychological behaviors clearly had a negative impact on the women's self-worth and dignity.

Although such acts were recognized by respondents as abuse, some women viewed psychologically abusive behavior, such as a husband's refusal to communicate with them, as discipline. Some noted that it was a man's way of drawing their attention to their wrongdoing. Felicia stated: "Yeah, when you disrespect or disobey your husband, he can stop talking to you even if you stay in the same room. He can deny you everything you ask to portray that you should stick to his commands" (Felicia, 20 years old). Another woman said: "Yeah... he can decide not to talk to me for a month just to teach me a lesson" (Anna, 20 years old).

### *c) Sexual violence*

Intimate partner violence, especially sexual violence is rarely discussed in families in Sub-Saharan Africa. The taboo on sexual violence was evident during my interactions with my respondents. Although most had experienced sexual violence, some considered the act to be private and found it difficult to discuss with strangers. Others did not even recognize it as an abusive act but perceived it as a husband's conjugal right. One woman stated: "For some men, sometimes you have just given birth and the baby is still young so you may not be able to have sex with him, but if he demands for sex and you refuse, he can force you to sleep with him and you can't do anything since he married you..... yeah you are his wife" (Maame, 45 years old). Another woman, when asked if she thought her husband was wrong when he forced her to have sex with him against her will, said: "No..., I feel he might be sexually aroused that's why he did that, so I will not be troubled, as for men that's their nature" (Akos, 25 years old).

In some cases, women's justification of sexual abuse was grounded on religious views. For instance, when asked if she considered forced sex as abuse, Anita said: "That one, [I] see it as a tradition. For us Muslims, what your husband wants is what you will do for him, you can't deny him sex" (Anita, 40 years old).

#### *b) Economic violence*

All participants considered a man's withholding of financial support as economic abuse. It was evident during the interview discussions that these women had a strong traditional perspective of gender roles, seeing men as breadwinners and women as domestic care givers. They believed that once married, a man (husband) was responsible for providing for a woman and the basic needs of the family, such as food, clothing, children's fees etc. Consequently, when he failed to contribute or denied them support, they considered it economic abuse. For instance, one woman said:

Like you have a child with a woman, and you don't know where/how they feed, get cloth to wear, soap to bath, yeah.... if you are a man and you do that it means you are mistreating her. Me, like this my children, their school, even common uniform, I have to buy for them myself. Yes, and he's having [money], not that he doesn't have [pause]. This is their uniform I bought for them; he has but will not buy. You will tell him, and he will either say he doesn't have or the way he will even reply you means that he doesn't want to give. (Jane, 27 years old)

Some participants noted that men could withhold support or refuse to economically provide for the family as a way of punishment or discipline. One said:

You see, right now I have two children, and he can decide to make things difficult for me, thus he can choose to give us money or not, or even with corn, he can either chose to give me the corn or not, or if he likes, he will not mind us or give us anything for a two months. When this happens, even though I don't work, I sometimes find some petty things to do so I can provide for my children till he is satisfied to help. (Anna, 20 years old)

In some cases, this form of economic violence triggered other forms of violence, which could be physical or verbal. For instance, one woman said:

What to eat the next day is even a problem sometimes, because the man can give you maize but will not add money to it for you to mill the maize. But me too, I wasn't having money to go and mill the corn to prepare food for the children and myself to eat. This situation triggered some petty, petty quarrels between us, and you know men, he will raise his hand on you [beat you]. (Anna, 20 years old)

Another respondent stated that in her situation, questioning her husband about his refusal to provide money to take her child to the hospital led to a quarrel and verbal abuse:

When your child is sick and you can't get money to take the child to hospital and you ask him, he will say he doesn't have money for you to take the child to the hospital. So, when you also say he has and that he is spending it on other women, it can bring fight, yes.... he gets angry and starts to insult you. (Ama, 20 years)

Some women said a husband's refusal to economically provide for the needs of the family could cause them to deny the husband sex. Jane narrated her own experience: "When [I] am in need of something, you refuse to provide for me, but you are forcing to have sex with me? You see, as [I] have asked something from you and you refuse, you see that am not even happy with you, neither to talk of giving myself to you" (Jane, 27 years old).

### **3.2.5. Factors contributing to women's IPV experiences**

#### *a) In-laws' intrusion*

Most women interviewed lived with their husbands and their husbands' family members as an extended family in a compound house. They said the activities of their in-laws could play a significant role in their husband's perpetration of violence against them. For instance, when asked what contributed to the slap she received from her husband, one woman initially said: "Hmmm, it's the devil" (Anita, 40 years old). However, when asked if anything else contributed to the slap, she added:

Sometimes, it's from the in-laws. They can gossip about you to your husband. Yeah, what happened was that his mum reported me to him that [I] have disrespected her, but that wasn't true. He asked me, and [I] said I haven't done anything, and he said his mum

too cannot lie to him. When [I] tried to defend myself and explained things to him, he felt I was challenging him. That triggered a fight between both of us, which made him slap me. (Anita, 40 years old)

Participants asserted that in some instances, instead of in-laws cautioning the men or reporting an abusive incident, they simply looked away. For instance, one woman, when asked about her in-laws' reaction when her husband was abusing her, said:

Hmmmm, my father in-law just said that we do not beat a woman in the farm, it's a taboo, and that if we have any quarrel, we should go home and settle, and he left. So, when his dad said that and he left, he began to rain insult on me and said I should find my own way to the house from the farm, and if I come to meet him in the house, am "dead."  
(Akua 20 years old)

Akua's father in-law's reaction points to the importance of societal perception of outsiders' responsibilities in the face of IPV. Most people perceive that disputes within couples should be settled by them. With this in mind, in-laws look on in silence while husbands abuse their wives in their presence (Ampofo, 2001; Offei-Aboagye, 1994; Amoakohene, 2004).

#### *b) Polygyny*

All the women interviewed were in a polygynous marriage, a common cultural practice in Northern Ghana, and one found among Christians, Muslims, and those who follow traditional African religion. This form of marriage, according to my participants, contributed to the abuse they suffered. Most women revealed that as soon as their husbands married another woman and brought her home, their attitudes changed, and they begin to abuse them. This was clear in one woman's statement:

At times when your husband marries another woman, he maltreats you. Yeah, he will treat you, the first wife as an “animal.” You see, the arrival of the new wife makes his attitude and behavior towards you change. Like I said, my child was sick hence he should give me money to take him to the hospital, and he said he doesn’t have money, but he was lying. When he gets money, he gives it to her, the new wife. So, when my child fell sick and he denied me of money, we fought, and he beat me. (Ama, 19 years old)

One participant talked about having to compete with another woman for financial support from her husband:

My child was sick, and at that time, a certain girl came to harvest beans at our farm, and he saw the girl and expressed interest in her. So, when he gets up, he picks the girl with his motor to the farm, while myself and my child walks quite a distance to the farm. After working in the farm till evening, he gave the girl some beans, and I also requested he gives me some too, so I can sell tomorrow, and buy medicine for my sick child since I don’t have money. He then said from the way I asked and behaved, I am behaving jealously, am a very envious woman, because he has given the other girl the beans that is why am being envious. When he said that I became very angry and began to exchange words with him, and he slapped me to the extent that I fell and twisted my wrist. (Akua, 20 years old)

Akos narrated a similar ordeal:

I recently had a fight with one of my husband’s wives, but my husband did not take time to find out what the problem is and who is saying the truth, he just took sides with the other woman and started beating and slapping me. I have not done anything to him. But

you can't stay with your rival while she pours water and sweeps on you, [paused], can you tolerate that one without retaliating? But when she does, the husband rather maltreats her. (Akos, 25 years old)

Some women thought men with many wives tend to be deceivers, and this causes misunderstanding and quarrels. When asked if polygynous marriage contributes to abuse in marriages, Anita said: "Yeah, when a man marries many wives that will definitely contribute to fight because he tells different things to all, since he cannot fulfill everybody's wants or provide for everyone. Example he might tell another he's done this for you but that will not be true" (Anita, 40 years old). One respondent noted that because society deems it right for men to marry more than one woman, when women question or object to their polygamous behaviors or extramarital affairs, they tend to react in an abusive manner:

As for men, it is only women who must be with only one man, but men cannot be with only one woman. Even if a man is married and he see a beautiful woman somewhere, he must go in for her. Even if he doesn't marry and bring her home, he will date her. When you the woman you notice it and argue with him, he starts to be abusive. (Asiamah, 45 years old)

### *c) Poverty and economic dependency of women*

None of the women interviewed had any form of formal education that could lead to lucrative employment. As a result, they were either at home or engaged in petty trading which did not give them enough income to support themselves and their children. They were economically dependent on their husbands, and in the women's understanding, this made them vulnerable to abuse. One woman stated:



Hmmmm, the moment you ask or request for something from him, he gets angry, and that triggers the quarrel which leads to the beating and slapping, etc. Hmmmm, I don't know if he doesn't want me to ask anything from him, I don't know..... You see, one time he gave me maize, but I wasn't having money to go and mill the corn to prepare food, this triggered some petty, petty quarrels between us, and you know men, he will beat you. Also, when there is no soap and you ask for money to buy one, then he gets angry and starts to insult you. (Akua, 20 years old)

Asiamah mentioned that a woman's inability to provide for herself presents men with the opportunity to abuse her:

Some women can't do anything for themselves. They don't even know how to fend for themselves. The man buys shoes, food, everything for her. But the woman doesn't give anything to the man. The man may not be happy with you. She always worries the man for everything hence he may feel he has the right to maltreat you. (Asiamah, 45 years old)

Some women thought if they had the opportunity to go to school and acquire a good job, they would not rely on their husbands so much. Jane commented: "I wish I had gone to school and gotten a good job to do, hmmm but because I didn't go to school and don't have anything or work doing, everything you are depending on them, and they can do whatever they want to do to you" (Jane, 27 years old). Another participant noted that in as much as education empowers women to be less economically dependent on men, it also enlightens and empowers them to be able to utilize information to their advantage:

As you can see, my in-law here is enlightened, she has been to school so if her husband maltreats her, she can take him to court. Yes, if you look at the way she has been to

school and is enlightened, do you think she can be maltreated by anyone? No! But those of us who have never been to school, we are the ones they did that to during those days.

(Asiamah, 45 years old)

Although participants mentioned economic dependence on men as a factor contributing to IPV, they also pointed to the effect of poverty on this dependence. One woman noted that in her experience, constantly requesting money from her husband when he did not have any triggered anger and quarrels:

I also think it's poverty, because maybe he doesn't have money and you keep asking him for help/support, that makes him angry and he begins to talk. Hmmmm, me I think that's why he constantly gets angry, because the way he behaves, I don't understand him. Yeah, even things that we are not supposed to quarrel about, it turns to quarrel. (Akua, 20 years old)

When asked to explain the constant quarrels and conflicts in her marriage, Mimi said: "It's poverty.... Poverty is normally the root of the abuse/maltreatment because when there is no poverty, the marriage is usually a happy one" (Mimi, 34 years old).

#### *d) Cultural beliefs and practices*

One socio-cultural practice participants identified as contributing to abuse was the bride price payment. Most women asserted that the practice creates a system of inequality between a husband and wife; it bestows power on men as they think they have purchased a wife and she is their property to be treated as they wish. One woman, when asked why her husband constantly abused her, said: "Yeah, he thinks he paid cows and because of that it seems like he's bought you and you have to obey him, [hmmmm] so he does whatever he wants to you" (Akos, 25 years

old). Another woman responded: “When you are given to marriage and they demand for cows as your bride price, then it’s like you have been sold to the man [pause] yeah so with that, the man can do to you whatever he wants” (Anita, 40 years old). In Anita’s case, the man felt he had the right to demand sex at any time, and her refusal could cause an abusive reaction in the form of insults, beating, or slapping. One participant reported:

When he makes the attempt and I make excuses, he insults and beats me, and you cannot resist him since he thinks he has “bought you”. This is because he has married you and has been given permission to take over you so even if you resist him, he allows you to lay down for him to go for all the ‘rounds’ he wants. Should you return to your family, they will allow you to go again and I did that most of the time. (Tiwaa, 19 years old)

The interview data suggest societal beliefs and perceptions of the prescribed roles for men and women in marriages were seen as contributing to IPV. These beliefs and perceptions are transmitted from generation to generation and are embedded in daily life. When participants were asked about their perception of gender roles in Ghana, everyone agreed that men and women are socialized differently. One participant noted: “Men are trained to be hardworking, so they can provide for their family. Women are to be trained on how to cook, for the food to taste good so that in the future she can cook for the husband, wash, fetch water etc.” (Akos, 25 years old). Similarly, Felicia said: “A man cannot go and fetch water, in my hometown, men don’t go to fetch water or cook, they don’t prepare some of the tuozaafi (TZ) because he will be laughed at. They will say you have a wife and you wouldn’t let her prepare food for you” (Felicia, 19 years old).

Akos further noted that a woman’s refusal to perform or conform to these roles as expected triggered quarrels and misunderstandings at home: “With men, you have to prepare water for

them to bath in the morning and cook for them, but if you are not able to, that might get him angry and mistreat you” (Akos, 25 years old). Another woman confirmed this statement:

Maybe you didn’t cook breakfast for him in the morning meanwhile he has given you “chop money<sup>7</sup>,” his cloths are dirty, and you didn’t wash them for him, you did not fetch water for him to bath. You see, when you are a woman and you do all these, won’t he become angry and begin to maltreat you? (Asiamah, 45 years old)

All women agreed that these stereotypical gender roles accorded men the position of authority in marriages. They are considered “family heads” who must make all major decisions, while women are expected to be subservient. Maame asserted:

In this part of the world, it doesn’t matter how successful a woman is, her husband holds the authority even if he is poor. Because you are staying in his house, and he paid your bride price. You can’t say that because you are richer than him, you are more powerful than him. No! It doesn’t happen like that. You do for him what he desires. (Maame, 35 years old)

*e) After childbirth*

An issue most respondents identified as a predisposing factor for IPV was childbirth. The moment they give birth, they said, their husband’s attitude changes, and they become irritated at everything the women do. One woman said: “We started fighting after I gave birth, actually there was no peace. you know, after you give birth, the man will now be running after other ladies and all those things, and you too you may not agree, so that too leads to fight” (Jane, 27 years old).

Akua also noted:

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<sup>7</sup> “Chop money” within the Ghanaian context is the daily housekeeping money traditionally given to wives by their husbands.

Oh, every woman experience that in our town. The men love and treat you right when they marry you at first but after childbirth, [paused] hmmm ... this change. Yeah, me when my husband married me first and I had not given birth, he treated me good. He was the one who knew where to go and get money for us to eat but the moment I got pregnant and gave birth, the quarrels began. (Akua, 20 years old)

### **3.2.6. Women's response to abuse**

Although some participants were aware of the formal means of reporting abuse, most preferred seeking help from an informal source. When asked if she had ever thought of reporting her husband's abusive behaviors to the police, one participant said: "Even if [I] will report him, [I] have to go to my father's house to do that for him to be called and cautioned, then I will be sent back to him, but he will definitely treat you the same way" (Anna, 20 years old). Likewise, Asiamah stated: "[I] will report you to an elder so the elder can call and admonish you thereby settling the matter between us. But you know, even if they intervene, they will ask you to go back to the children. Go! Even if he will kill you, let him kill you but you don't need to leave the children alone" (Asiamah, 45 years old). These women clearly see both formal and informal avenues for help as ineffective; they also fear being exposed to further and perhaps worse forms of abuse.

One woman said some women prefer to report IPV informally rather than formally because reporting to the police can lead to divorce or dissolution of a marriage. It can also affect a woman's future marriage opportunities:

Hmmm, here we can't do that, to go and report your husband for him to be arrested?

No.... when you report your husband to the police, you will be sacked, you and your

child from the house, and the marriage could be dissolved. For going to report your husband to the police, you will never get any man to marry you again in the community.

(Akua, 20 years old)

Yaa confirmed this: “No, no. in my town we don’t do that, if you report your husband to the police, they cannot give your hand in marriage again. If you do that to him, and someone else wants to marry you, he will tell the person what you did to him and he too will not marry you”

(Yaa, married at the age of 15).

One participant noted that even if a woman decides to report her experiences to the police, she will not get justice if she lacks funds to pursue the case:

Okay here, when you take that decision and you don’t have money or witness you will be tagged the bad one. You know, most policemen want money so if you have a case without money, then you become the bad one so is better to stop than to complain to the police. The policemen here are not responsible so all one does is to weep and cry her heart out. (Mina, 24 years old)

None of the women reported abuse to the police. Instead, all decided to stay in an abusive relationship, despite their experiences, because of their children and because they wanted to retain their parental rights. People from the northern part of Ghana practice a patrilineal system of inheritance, so when a man pays a bride price and a woman gives birth, the child belongs to him. Thus, when a woman decides to leave her marriage, she must do so without her children.

Asiamah said:

We the kusasis, we are afraid of our husband because of our children. If you misbehave and he sacks you, he takes the children away from you. This is because the children are

the man's property. He gave the cows because of the children. That is why the women are not able to leave their children behind. You see, who gives birth and will be suffering somewhere, and your children too will be somewhere else. (Asiamah, 45 years old)

Anita confirmed this: “[I] know I can report to the police, but I have two kids with him. if I report him, he will ask me to go and leave the children with him because I did not come to the marriage with any children. Hmmm..., so you think of your children too, and you forget everything” (Anita, married at the age of 14).

One participant indicated that, according to custom, families are expected to give back the bride price if their female children leave the marriage. Most men know their in-laws cannot afford to do so, and they capitalize on that knowledge to maltreat their wives:

Because am a “kusasi”, if a man marries you, he has to give cows to your parents, so if he has given either one or two, you see that he will be insulting you, thinking that if you go, your parent have to pay the cow back and if you also know that your parents will not get the money to pay back, then you have to also stay like that and he will be abusing you. (Jane, 27 years old)

### **3.2.7. Effects of violence on women**

Most women recounted the mental and physical effects of their abusive experiences. Narrating her ordeal, one woman said: “Hmmm, he once beat and slapped me to the extent that I fell and had a problem with my waist, so I had to be taken to a different town for a massage” (Akua, 20 years). Anna had a similar story: “My sister, I will not lie to you, he once slapped me, and I had a problem with my teeth. I really felt that, so I packed my thing to my family house,

but I realized it was better for me to come back to my husband and go through this abuse, than to go back to stay with my mum and young ones again” (Anna, 20 years old).

Jane gave a further example, saying: “I now have effect on my eye and hand [paused], can you see my hand, can you see there is any difference between the right and left? Yeah, but now because it’s been some years, you will not really see it” (Jane, 27 years old). Jane, however, implied that her religion helped her overcome the emotional consequences of her husband’s verbal abuse: “You know, he can insult you to the extent that, if not because am a Christian, I will not forget all those insults” (Jane, 27 years old). This comment is particularly interesting because it draws attention to the use of religious belief as a coping strategy when dealing with IPV.

### **3.4. Conclusion**

This chapter outlines the findings of my in-depth interviews with 15 women. In it, I draw on the interview transcripts to illustrate and elaborate on the themes that emerged from the data: knowledge of child marriage and IPV; forms of IPV experience; circumstances leading to IPV; contributing factors to child marriage. In the next chapter, I connect these themes with the literature on IPV and child marriage.



## **CHAPTER 4**

### **DISCUSSION**

#### **4.0. Introduction**

Many studies show that women are at an increased risk of experiencing IPV if they marry before they are 18 years old (Kidman, 2016; Raj et al., 2010; Rahman et al., 2014; Speizer & Pearson, 2011; United Nation International Children's Emergency Fund, 2005; Nasrullah et al., 2015, 2016, 2014). Yet little is known about these women's knowledge, understanding, and opinions of IPV or the factors contributing to their high risk, particularly in the Ghanaian context. To fill this important research gap, I interviewed 15 Ghanaian women who married before age 18. In this chapter, I discuss my findings in relation to the literature and the research questions.

#### **4.1. Research question 1: What are the causal factors of child marriage in Ghana?**

My participants identified multiple interrelated socioeconomic factors as causal factors in their early marriages, including poverty, teenage pregnancy, level of education, and cultural/traditional practices.

*Poverty:* Poverty was a particularly salient factor among my respondents. In times of financial crisis/hardship, marrying off the girl child is perceived as a way to reduce the economic stress because of the bride price payment. In Northern Ghana, the bride price is demanded in the form of cows. On average, the bride's family receives two to four cows from the groom's family, with each cow worth about GHC 15,000 (\$3,200 US) (Dery, 2015). These cows can be sold to meet the family's economic needs or leverage a debt. This narrative was common among all

participants, confirming previous studies' evidence that poverty contributes to child marriages in Africa (UNICEF, 2001; Alhassan, 2013, 2010; WILDAF, 2014; UNICEF, 2001; De Groot, Kuunyem, & Palermo, 2018; Otoo-Oyortey, & Pobi, 2003; Walker, 2012). The bride price places the family above the poverty line of GHC 1,314 and raises the average annual household income (Cooke, Hague, & McKay, 2016; Ghana Statistical Service (GSS), 2014). In addition to its economic benefit, the bride price is a form of cultural and traditional compensation to the bride's family for the loss of their daughter's productive labour.

Although most women said their families made the decision for them, a few willingly consented to marry early to help ease the financial burden of their families. Anna revealed that she agreed to marry early with the hope that her husband could financially support her siblings. However, this hope was crushed; soon after their marriage, her husband experienced severe financial difficulties.

*Lack of education:* Education is another a predisposing factor for child marriage (Erulkar, 2013; Alhassan, 2013; Steinhaus et al., 2016; UNICEF, 2005) and was frequently mentioned by my respondents. A lack of education puts women at risk of early marriage. A recent study by Steinhaus et al. (2016) on the causes of child marriage in Kenya and Zambia finds females who spend more years in school and attain higher education delay marriage compared to school dropouts or those who have never been to school. Most of my interviewees corroborated this finding; the majority had no form of formal education, while the few with formal education only acquired primary education (an equivalence of grades 1-6). Only one respondent had acquired a junior high school education (an equivalence of grade 9). The women expressed a desire for higher education, but circumstances, such as the poor economic condition of the family, forced their parents to choose the education of their male children over their female children. The

literature outlines gender differences in educational attainment in Ghana and Africa as a whole, with boys prioritized over girls for formal and higher education (Alhassan, 2010; GSS, 2014, 2011; UNICEF, 2005; UNESCO, 1993), because of the belief that girls, on average, perform more poorly in school than boys. Families in Northern Ghana also place less value on female education because it is a patrilineal society; as such, people believe females will eventually be married off into another family and make a limited contribution to the development of their own families. Male children are expected to continue the lineage and become breadwinners. Thus, giving higher educational opportunities to the male child translates into better employment and higher socioeconomic status.

*Pre-marital pregnancy:* The literature shows that teenage or pre-marital pregnancy predisposes a girl child to early marriage (Steinhaus et al., 2016; Alhassan, 2010; UNICEF, 2016). The women I interviewed confirmed this. Some said they were married off before age 18 specifically because they became pregnant. When I probed further, they said parents decide to marry their daughters to the men who impregnate them to avoid humiliation, stigmatization, and societal ridicule. In most traditional Ghanaian communities, pregnancy out of wedlock brings shame and dishonour to the girl child, as well as her family; children are considered legitimate only when conceived within marriage.

Other women mentioned that in situations where parents fear the possibility of their teenage girl becoming pregnant because of a promiscuous way of life, they are tempted to marry her off early to avert any potential shame from pregnancy. Previous studies in Ghanaian communities show that the increasing rate of child marriage is a result of the higher number of teenage girls engaging in premarital sex (Alhassan, 2010; Somerset, 2000). About 40 percent of the women I interviewed who fell within this category lamented that they were forced to marry

early because they dropped out of school and were engaging in premarital sex. A few others (20 percent) stated that they willingly moved in with their male partners after becoming sexually active or pregnant to ensure their male partners took full responsibility for the children.

*Cultural beliefs and traditions:* Another factor driving child marriage is culture and tradition. Traditional practices include the betrothal of a female daughter to a man before she is born or a few weeks after she is born; child betrothal is rampant in Northern Ghana. My data also show that in the Bawku West district a female child, irrespective of her age, can be made to marry her sister's or aunt's husband for various reasons. Sometimes the female relative is old and infertile; at other times, the marriage is made so the girl's family can gain more cows or children. The interviewed women said their fathers played a very instrumental role in either practice, with little or no consent from them; they could not refuse without being disowned. Paradoxically, these traditional practices are intended to reinforce family relationships, hence breaking such contract may result in betrayal or jeopardize crucial family contacts (Oduro, 2017; WILDAF, Ghana, 2014; ICRW, 2007; Walker, 2012).

One woman mentioned that although her father betrothed her to someone and agreed to complete the traditional marriage when she was fully mature, she was made to marry earlier because her family needed cows to pay off her brother's bride's price. Failure to provide this on time could have resulted in losing his bride to another man. In the three northern regions, the cows demanded during the marriage ceremonies of the female children enable the male children to pay off similar demands from the families of their brides. Disturbingly, this traditional practice contributes to early marriages.

#### **4. 2. Research question 2: What are the IPV experiences of Ghanaian women who marry before age 18?**

Research shows that women who marry as children have a heightened risk of experiencing varied forms of IPV. Yet little is known about the specific forms of IPV among this population, and no study in Africa, including Ghana, explicitly examines the lived IPV experiences of women who marry before age 18. The few existing studies in the area, which mostly focus on South Asian countries like India, Bangladesh, Pakistan etc., find these women experience higher levels of physical, sexual, psychological, and verbal abuse from their spouses than women who marry as adults (Rahman et al., 2014; Raj et al., 2010; Speizer & Pearson, 2011; Jensen and Thornton, 2003; UNICEF, 2005; Nasrullah et al., 2015, 2016, 2017). Consistent with these studies, all the women I interviewed were victims of IPV. Their IPV experiences included physical, verbal, emotional, sexual, and economic violence. Importantly, participants mentioned that being married at a very early age increased their risk of experiencing IPV. Most were married to men who were significantly older than they were. Arguably, the age gap resulted in husbands perceiving them as children instead of partners or independent adults.

Not only are women who marry before age 18 more likely to be victims of IPV, but they are also more likely to justify their husband's controlling behaviours and physical abuse (Jensen & Thornton, 2003; UNICEF, 2005). I found that despite the abuse experienced by my participants, some justified their husband's violent actions. The women blamed themselves for disobeying their husbands and triggering the abuse. Notably, participants who justified abuse referred to their husbands' behaviours as punishment instead of violence and/or abuse. Scholars link the notion of obedience and justification of a husband's abusive behaviour to the internalization of traditional gender norms during socialization, especially in patriarchal societies (Amoakohene, 2004; Ampofo, 2001; Cantalupo et al., 2006; Offei-Aboagye, 1994). In most patriarchal societies, women are socialized as "second class" members of the society and, as

such, are subjected to male supervision and leadership (Cantalupo et al., 2006). Thus, women accept that men can control or "discipline" their wives. Women are required to submit to men, as men are the head of the family.

*Sexual abuse:* Submitting to the authority of men includes permitting them to engage in sexual intercourse with women with or without consent. The women I interviewed talked about being forced to have sex with their husbands. Sometimes they were tired, feared getting pregnant, or had just given birth and were recovering. However, they were forced to give in to their partners. They justified sexual violence by drawing on traditional and religious beliefs that a husband has rights over the body of his wife upon performing the marriage rites and paying the bride price (Ampofo & Prah, 2009; Acheampong, 2010; Adinkrah, 2011; Ampofo, 1993). This idea is clearly stated in the traditional marriage rites in Ghana. For example, during a typical traditional marriage ceremony, the woman is advised never to refuse the husband sex upon demand; she has to be ready to satisfy her husband at any time (Acheampong, 2010). These rights permit men to exert force if their wives refuse to fulfill their marital responsibility.

Importantly, during the discussions of sexual intercourse, I noted the women were uncomfortable and seemed reluctant to discuss sexual violence. Traditionally, sexual intercourse is perceived as private and confidential. Reluctance to discuss sexual activities means women will certainly not be comfortable reporting sexual violence. Similarly, Amoakohene (2004) and Acheampong (2010) find Ghanaian women are mostly hesitant to discuss sexual abuse in marriage because of its intimate nature.

*Verbal and emotional abuse:* Findings from studies on IPV and child marriage confirm that women who marry as children suffer verbal or emotional abuse (United Nation International Children's Emergency Fund, 2005; Nasrullah et al., 2015, 2016; Rahman et al., 2014; Speizer &

Pearson, 2011; Kidman, 2016). This finding is corroborated by my study; all 15 women said their husbands had used derogatory words, insulted them, humiliated them, refused to eat their food, or decided not to talk to them. However, the majority understood a husband's emotionally abusive behaviour as a form of discipline instead of emotional abuse. They considered emotional abuse as a husband's way of drawing their attention to and punishing them for wrongdoing. Although emotional/verbal abuse does not leave any visible marks, my respondents' comments indicate the effect is more harmful and lasts longer than for other forms of IPV. Emotional violence causes women to question their self-worth with significant influence on their self-esteem and psychological health. According to my respondents, a husband's refusal to communicate often distorts the peace in the home, causing them to be depressed, anxious, and lonely.

*Economic abuse:* Most studies on IPV among women who marry as children concentrate on physical, emotional/psychological, and sexual IPV, with little or no insight into economic IPV. Economic abuse ranges from a husband's refusal to financially contribute to the family's needs or withholding money needed for basic necessities such as food, clothing, shelter, children's education, etc. to more intricate refusals, such as preventing women from pursuing higher education or finding informal or formal employment opportunities (Postmus, Hoge, Breckenridge, Sharp-Jeffs, & Chung, 2018; Sedziafa, Tenkorang, Owusu, & Sano, 2017; Fawole, 2008). Although the topic is under-researched, recent evidence shows that economic violence is common across cultures, irrespective of social class. For instance, poverty and the high dependence of a woman on a male partner are linked to higher rates of controlling behaviours and economic abuse (Postmus, Hoge, Breckenridge, Sharp-Jeffs, & Chung, 2018; Sedziafa, Tenkorang, Owusu, & Sano, 2017; Fawole, 2008; Amoakohene, 2004). Arguably,

women who marry before age 18 are less likely to attain a higher educational level because they are unable to continue schooling after marriage. In the Ghanaian context, low educational attainment is highly correlated with low chances of being gainfully employed in the formal sector of the economy: individuals with low educational background work in the informal sectors where they mostly earn below the minimum wage. My participants identified themselves as poor and were employed in the informal sector, where they earned below the minimum wage of USD\$ 2 a day (see also GSS, 2014). As this wage is inadequate to meet the daily needs of the family, the women relied completely on their husbands for financial support. However, many of these men refused to help. Participants noted that refusal to financially support the wife could be because she disobeyed her husband or failed to perform an expected gender role. In such instances, men may withhold money or refuse to economically provide for the family as a disciplinary measure. This finding confirms previous findings that economic violence is an intentional pattern of behaviour carried out by a husband, specifically to control and interfere with a wife's ability to acquire, use, and maintain economic resources (Postmus et al. 2018; Sedziafa et al., 2017; Fawole, 2008).

Ironically, this type of economic violence contradicts strongly held traditional beliefs on the role of the husband as the provider. The abandonment of this belief added to the psychological stress experienced by my participants who were forced to combine domestic work with providing financially for their families. In some situations, my participants said, a man's refusal to financially provide for the family led to physical and emotional abuse if the women demanded they be responsible. Questioning their husband's neglect of their financial responsibility triggered quarrels which caused their husbands to physically or verbally abuse them. This finding agrees with Sedziafa et al.'s (2017) study on women's experiences of intimate



partner economic violence in the Eastern Region of Ghana; economic abuse leads to physical abuse and encourages sexual exploitation of women. However, unlike the participants in Fawole's (2008) studies who stated that they consented to their husband's sexual desire as a way of inhibiting economic violence, some of respondents confirmed they consciously denied their husband's sexual advances if they refused to financially provide for them and their children. Yet as discussed above, refusing sex could trigger physical, emotional, or sexual violence. As previous work shows, the various forms of IPV are interconnected.

#### **4.3. Research question 3: Why is IPV rampant in early marriages?**

The literature shows IPV is widespread in child marriages, but little is known about it from a woman's perspective. This research deficit led me to ask my participants what factors they considered had contributed to their IPV experiences. They confirmed that multiple factors contributed to their experience of partner abuse. One such factor, arguably the most important, was poverty which results in economic dependency on men. Certainly, the gender gap in education disadvantages girls from becoming financially independent: only five of the 15 women I interviewed had formal education (primary and junior high level), while ten had no formal education. Higher educational attainment increases men's socio-economic status and places them above women, particularly less educated women. Low levels of education result in either unemployment or employment in the informal sector. As noted above, the income from informal sectors is inadequate to support women and their children. As a result, they tend to depend on their spouses for financial support and this, in turn, makes them vulnerable to abuse. Although women, in general, acquire low levels of education, child brides are disproportionately affected. Studies indicate that most women who marry before age 18 have never been to school or are more likely to drop out of school because of pregnancy and the responsibilities associated with

being a wife (Svanemyr, Chandra-Mouli, Christiansen & Mbizvo, 2012; Kidman, 2016). This limits them from acquiring the skills needed to engage in higher income-generating activities (Svanemyr et al. 2012). The situation affects their socioeconomic status and increases their financial dependence on their husbands. Research shows financial contribution toward meeting the needs of the family is highly correlated to decision-making power and autonomy (Nour, 2006). As women with low income are unable to substantially contribute to the financial demands of the home, they lose their power to participate in both crucial and non-crucial decisions in their households. These decisions include when and how sexual intercourse is to take place, where and where not to go, who and who not to talk to, what and what not to acquire and so forth. It is, therefore, not surprising that child marriage is highly correlated with IPV, as the literature shows that dependence on men for economic resources is associated with the risk of experiencing sexual, physical, economic, and emotional violence (Amoakohene, 2004; Ofei-Aboagye, 1994; Bowman, 2003; Cantalupo et al., 2006; Tenkorang et al., 2013; Dery & Diedong, 2014; Issahaku, 2017). By the same token, studies by Faramarzi et al. (2005) and Vakili et al., (2010) in Iran find unemployed women are more likely to be exposed to intimate partner abuse than women who are employed and financially independent.

A second factor was culture. Interviewed women comments indicated that certain sociocultural practices, including payment of the bride price (dowry) to a woman's family during customary marriage rites, support male power and superiority, a finding substantiated in other research (Cantaloupe et al., 2006; Ampofo, 1993; Bowman, 2003; Illika, 2005; Dery, 2015). Traditionally, the bride price payment is meant to bestow status, dignity, and respect on a woman, protect women against possible abuse, stabilize relationships in marriage, and join two families together (Dery, 2015; Ansell, 2001; Muthegheki et al., 2012). Yet all the women I

interviewed believed this practice took away their rights as equal partners. Contrary to the ideal traditional evaluation of bride price, in these women's experience it is misconstrued as an exchange of authority from the bride's family to the husband. In Northern Ghana, the bride price is generally paid in the form of cows; with the recent increase in the price of cows, paying two to four cows for a bride enables men to perceive women as "commoditized objects." Accordingly, a woman's value is equated to material items or money and, as such, is manipulated to men's benefit. Women who are not able to live up to their marital expectations are abused or forced to engage in behaviours they do not consent to. Consistent with my study, Ofei-Aboagye (1994) noted in his findings that in the Akan culture, the bride price, or "tiri nsa," bestows power and control on the men who pay it. Men often equate the bride price with purchasing or owning their wives (Adegoke & Oladeji, 2007; Ofei-Aboagye, 1994). This situation obviously creates a gender power imbalance in traditional African marriages and increases women's risk of IPV (Tenkorang et al., 2013; Bowman, 2003; Illika, 2005). It also confirms UNICEF's (2000) finding that the bride price payment creates a power disparity and fuels men's controlling and abusive behaviour, including the control of women's sexuality. This is common in the Ghanaian setting, as in traditional marriage rites, women have no right to deny their husbands the "marriage cake"; the husband has the right to the sex organ of his wife upon paying the bride price and can utilize it at any time and in whichever manner he deems satisfying (Ampofo, 1993, p.108). Ampofo's (1993) finding echoes Tiwaa's assertion that "when a man marries you, he has been permitted to take over you and your body so even if you don't want to, you are supposed to lay down for him to go all the 'rounds' he wants." Jane argued that the payment of the bride price continually encourages the perpetuation of abuse against women. If a woman wants to terminate the marriage contract, she said, her family is required to refund the bride price; in most cases, the

woman's family is not able to do so, leaving women no choice but to stay and endure the abuse. It is also important to note that the payment of the bride price legitimizes marriages and makes it official. Children born into legitimate marriages in a patrilineal patriarchal society belong to the man. In Bawku, the children belong with their father, and the mother has no right to remove them from "his" home. In this cultural context, a woman who leaves an abusive marriage is likely to be forced to leave her children. This prevents women from leaving; they stay and tolerate the abuse for the sake of their children. Other studies have similar findings (WHO, 2012; Sedziafa et al., 2016; Dery, 2015; Cantalupo et al., 2006).

A third factor was gender norms. Socially constructed gender roles in Ghanaian societies also endorse and reinforce women's vulnerability to violence and accord men positions of power (Ampofo, 2001; Bell & Naugle, 2008; Cantaloupe et al., 2006): Society prescribes suitable roles, attitudes, and behaviours for women and men, and these are embedded in their daily lives. Men are expected to display normative masculine behaviours, including being assertive, aggressive, domineering, and independent leaders, while women are trained to be dependent, submissive, domestic caregivers (Adegoke & Oladeji, 2007; Ampofo, 2001; Amoakohene, 2004). My participants pointed to a gender role differentiation and said it was highly linked to IPV experiences: girls are trained in domestic chores, and boys are trained to be domestic heads and breadwinners with the right to assert power and impose decisions on women, including reproductive decisions. According to these women, refusal to meet gender role expectations exposes them to abuse in the form of slapping, beating, or insults. For instance, a man is trained to expect his food to be ready and served on the dining table when he returns from work; a wife's failure to meet this expectation means she is irresponsible, and this deserves some form of discipline, either physical or verbal. Meanwhile, women expect men to be breadwinners and

family heads who are responsible for meeting the family's needs. Men who are unable to do so, either intentionally or unintentionally, are perceived as abandoning their marital responsibilities. Women might then nag and/or verbally abuse their partners, and they, in turn, because of their gendered socialization, may retaliate with physical or other forms of violence/ disciplinary action to maintain their authority. Supporting the findings of Dery (2015) and Ampofo and Boateng (2008), my results indicate this stereotypical gendered role differentiation creates discrimination and unequal gender power relations between men and women, with the advantage given to men.

A fourth factor was the living arrangements, specifically the presence of in-laws in the household. The literature reveals that living in the same housing environment with in-laws and extended family members increases the risk of partner abuse (Adomako, 2017; Clark et al., 2010; Choi et al., 2010; Jordan and Bhandari 2016; Nasrullah et al., 2015; Raj et al, 2006; WHO, 2005). Choi et al.'s (2010) study of battered wives in China discovers that in-law conflicts are significantly associated with women's experience of IPV: parents and daughters-in-law may have disputes about money matters, lifestyle, children, gender role expectations, or the inability to conceive. In such disputes, husbands side mostly with their mothers and abuse/discipline their wives to appease their mothers. This finding is confirmed by Nasrullah et al.'s (2015) qualitative study in Pakistan on the circumstances exposing women who marry below age 18 to IPV: a majority (13 out of 19) of the women interviewed mentioned that their in-laws' intrusion in their family affairs instigated their husband's abusive behaviour, in the form of beating, insults, yelling, or humiliation. In my study, women who lived in houses with their husband's family members were abused by their husbands because of the nature of the relations, behaviours, and activities of their in-laws. For instance, one woman mentioned that her husband slapped her because her mother-in-law lied to him, saying she showed her a lack of respect. Another woman

stated that her sisters- and brothers-in-law would verbally abuse her when she could not wash their clothes as expected. But when she complained to her husband, it led to physical and verbal abuse.

A fifth factor was the polygynous nature of marriage in the area. Polygynous marriage is considered illegal under civil law and marriage ordinance, but the customary or traditional and Islamic law in Ghana allows men to have multiple wives. As the Bawku West district is predominantly a Muslim community (almost 90 percent of the populace are Muslims), it was not surprising that all the women I interviewed identified as participating in polygynous relationships. Interviewed women confirmed that polygyny is a contributing factor to IPV experiences in child marriages. According to my participants, living in the same house as their husband's wives often led to jealousy and rivalry which triggered misunderstandings and conflicts. As with in-law conflicts, husbands could feel forced to take a side; to ensure peace, they might discipline the supposed offender, often through verbal, emotional, economic, or physical violence. My findings are confirmed by a nationally representative study conducted by the Gender Studies and Human Right Documentation Center (GSHRDC) showing that having a rival wife contributes to physical violence for about seven percent of Ghanaian women. A husband's abusive behaviour toward one wife could be instigated by a co-wife who dislikes her or wants to gain favour with the husband. The women I interviewed said husbands usually pay more attention to the newly added wife and are more financially generous to her. When this happens, the neglected wives may question his behaviour, leading to beatings, insults, or slaps.

Importantly, Islamic laws only permit multiple partners or polygyny when the man proves his financial capacity to support multiple wives and children. However, the participants' lived experiences suggest these men, after marrying an additional wife, mostly forsake their

economic responsibilities to their children and family. They leave these responsibilities to the wives, expecting each woman to fend for herself and her children. My participants regarded this as economic abuse; they also accepted that this situation triggered other forms of abuse as husbands tended to be abusive to reinforce their authority as men. Specifically, Lan said that on one occasion when she requested money to send her sick daughter to the clinic, the husband refused and told her to look for her own money or find other traditional means, because he had not given money to the other wife when her son was sick. This, according to her, triggered disagreements that led to physical and verbal abuse.

Polygyny also affects women's rights and freedom within marriage, as women in this type of marriage are more likely to be controlled by their husbands. It is therefore not surprising that a recent Ghanaian study by Issahaku (2017) finds the type of marriage influences women's exposure to IPV. More precisely, women in polygynous marriages have a heightened risk of experiencing partner violence. Similar findings are reported by other studies (Abramsky et al., 2011; Abrahams et al., 2004; Adomako, 2017; Gender Studies & Human Rights Documentation Centre, 2015; Jansen & Agadjanian, 2016; Onigbogi et al., 2015).

The postpartum period emerged as a final factor in the IPV experiences of women who married as children. Ninety percent of the women I interviewed complained about their husbands' change in behaviour immediately after they gave birth. According to many of these women, during the postpartum period, their husbands engaged in multiple nonmarital sexual relationships. Confrontations over these relationships triggered economic, physical, and verbal abuse. This confirms other studies finding that women are at an increased risk of suffering from partner abuse if their husbands have nonmarital sexual relationships. (Abramsky et al., 2011; Abrahams et al., 2004; Issahaku, 2017; Townsend et al., 2011). Other respondents said that after

childbirth, their husbands began to show interest in marrying another woman and neglected their responsibility toward the new mother and child. Still others noted that during postpartum, their husbands wanted to have sex with them; when they refused, they were verbally abused. These findings support Agrawal et al.'s (2014) study in the United States on postpartum IPV among young mothers between the ages of 14 and 24; the authors find a 33.8 percent prevalence of IPV — physical, emotional, and sexual IPV — within six to 12 months after childbirth. They also discover that women's experience of IPV after childbirth significantly increases their risk of postpartum depression, stress, and unintended pregnancy. These authors' findings are in line with Harrykissoo et al.'s (2002) finding that the rate of physical partner violence among adolescent mothers is as high as 21.3 percent three months after childbirth. Disturbingly, Harrykissoo et al. (2002) also show that 78 percent of adolescent mothers who experience postpartum IPV report not experiencing IPV before childbirth. This finding parallels my participants' statements that their husbands initially were not abusive, but became abusive after childbirth, upon marrying a new wife, or after starting extramarital affairs.

#### **4.4. Conclusion**

This chapter situates the study's findings for each research question within the findings of previous studies on child marriage and IPV. The next chapter considers the strengths and limitations of the study and makes recommendations for future studies and policy interventions in Ghana.



## **CHAPTER 5**

### **CONCLUSION**

#### **5.0. Introduction**

Previous research has established that child marriage is a pervasive social problem that disproportionately affects women, violates their human rights, has a negative impact on their health, and exposes them to higher rates of physical, emotional/psychological, economic, and sexual violence. Child marriage and IPV threaten the socioeconomic development of many countries and undermine their commitment to ensuring gender equality and eliminating all forms of discrimination against women (Amoakohene, 2004; Alhassan, 2013; Cantalupo et al. 2006; UNICEF, 2016; UNICEF, 2005; Raj, 2010; Kidman, 2016). Quantitative studies show that child marriage is on the increase in Ghana: one out of every five girls marries before her 18<sup>th</sup> birthday (Ghana Demographic and Health Survey, 2008; Ghana Statistical Service, 2011; Ghana Web, 2014; UNICEF, 2015; de Groot, Kuunyem, & Palermo, 2018). Despite its pervasiveness, no qualitative study has examined the lived IPV experiences of Ghanaian women who marry as children.

Given this gap, I collected and analyzed Ghanaian women's narratives on IPV. Specifically, I explored the knowledge, understanding, and opinions of Ghanaian women who married before age 18. In addition, I probed their understanding of the factors leading to IPV, their perspectives on child marriage, and the socio-cultural and economic factors influencing early marriages. The study's sample was 15 ever-married women from Bawku West, who married before their 18th birthday.

Consistent with the literature, I found women who married as children had experienced different types of IPV – physical, emotional/verbal, sexual, and economic. Physical violence included slapping, beating, pushing, and having objects thrown at them. Their experiences of sexual abuse came in the form of coerced/unwanted sexual intercourse. With verbal/emotional abuse, participants reported being humiliated, insulted, and threatened by their partner as a way of punishing them for disobeying their husband’s authority. Economic abuse occurred when their partners withheld or refused to financially provide for the family. Notably, economic abuse provoked other forms of IPV, including verbal and physical. Importantly, the interview data confirmed that women’s experience of partner abuse affected their mental and physical health. For instance, physical abuse like beating and slapping led to longer term physical injuries, including swollen faces and bruised eyes. Verbal abuse had a long-lasting impact on their self-worth and esteem.

The women mentioned multiple factors leading to abuse. Particular issues, such as in-laws’ intrusions, poverty and dependency on their partners for economic support, certain sociocultural practices such as bride price/dowry payment, socially constructed gender roles, and polygyny made them vulnerable to experience abuse from their partners. Marrying at a young age was certainly a salient factor, and I found wide age gaps in many of the couples. Factors driving the practice of child marriage included poverty, teenage pregnancy, lack of education, and cultural and traditional practices.

Participants reported adopting various strategies to cope with partner abuse. Most confided in friends, relatives, and community members. Overall, they preferred informal rather than formal avenues like the police or DOVVSU because they feared divorce or dissolution of their marriage. Further, women thought reporting abuse to the police affected their future

marriage opportunities in the community and made them vulnerable to ridicule and stigma. They also confirmed that the patrilineal and patriarchal norms in the region that give full custody of children to men in cases of divorce or separation prevented them from reporting incidents of abuse and losing the relationship with their children. The fear of losing their children should they decide to leave made them stay in an abusive relationship.

### **5.1. Strengths and Limitations**

This study provides the first known qualitative evidence of the lived IPV experiences of child brides in Ghana. By employing a feminist methodological approach, I allowed 15 women to share their lived experiences from their own perspective. In doing so, I affirmed the feminist purpose of “making diverse women's voices, and experiences heard” (Ramazanoglu & Holland, 2002, p.15). My transcription, translation, and data analysis methods were designed to ensure I did not misrepresent their narratives. From these narratives, I provided evidence that corroborates previous studies on child marriage and IPV. Women who marry as children are susceptible to physical, verbal/emotional, sexual, and economic violence. By permitting women to narrate their stories, I discovered some of the many factors driving the incidence of IPV among Ghanaian women in the Bawku West district. These included issues with in-laws, polygyny, poverty, the economic dependency of women on men, cultural practices and beliefs, and postpartum periods.

Selecting and examining the views of women who have not had any encounter with or utilized any formal agencies working on IPV was beneficial to this study. Their knowledge and perceptions on child marriage and IPV were not influenced by any service provider. This reduced the ability of external perceptions to affect the uniqueness of the information produced.

Like all other studies, my study was not without limitations. For instance, researcher bias which emanates from a researcher's unique perspectives or personal values may influence objectivity in research, and my personal position as a female and a gender activist may have influenced my interpretation of my findings. To preclude this possibility, I made the data and interpretations available to some of the interviewed women so they could verify that it correctly reflected the information they provided during the interview. As my position as a female likely made me more empathetic, I also made an effort to prevent my emotions, assumptions, and prejudices from influencing interactions. By being reflexive, I was able to remain objective (as much as possible) to ensure that the subjective views/experience of child brides emerged with minimum interference from my own background and world view.

Another area of concern was the transcription process. Some errors, including deliberate alterations, accidental alterations, and unavoidable alterations of data, could occur during transcription (Poland, 1995). Poland (1995) contends that although some of these errors are avoidable, accidental alterations in sentence structure, the use of quotation marks, mistaking words, and phrasing respondents' words are usually unavoidable. In this study, I minimized transcription errors by personally transcribing the interviews. I worked with a trained teacher who was fluent in the interview languages to crosscheck transcripts with the recordings and later with some participants.

Finally, the study was qualitative and had a small sample size (15 participants), precluding the ability to generalize findings. The sampling techniques also limit the transferability and generalizability of this research (Bryman & Alan, 2016). Nevertheless, using a small sample size allowed me to involve participants in the research process.

## 5.2. Recommendations

The study's results confirm that girls with no or low levels of education are more likely to marry before age 18 than those with more education. Compared to women from Southern Ghana, I found women in the Bawku West district had low levels of education, although basic education is free and compulsory in Ghana. Most families in the district are unable to pay other required levies (including maintenance fees) and buy the needed textbooks for their girl children to remain, let alone excel in school. The few who are able to complete basic education are unable to enroll in high schools and gain access to post-secondary education. This increases their likelihood of marrying early. My findings suggest better education would play a significant role in curbing early or child marriage. Education equips girls with the skills and knowledge needed for employment to support themselves and their families, thereby breaking the cycle of poverty. It also empowers girls with information to make informed decisions about their future. With education, women in the Bawku West district could break the cycle of child marriage and IPV.

Looking at the numerous benefits of education to the girl child and the nation, I recommend the Government of Ghana prioritize female education. Importantly, I recommend incentives to ensure the barriers to education are eliminated: this will enable girls to go to school and fulfil their educational aspirations. Educational incentives can be in the form of funding or scholarships to the post-secondary level. It is important to note that the government of Ghana through the Education Ministry introduced the free and compulsory universal basic education (FCUBE) system as well as the school feeding program, especially to benefit poor households in Ghana and to ease their financial burden. However, the policy failed to achieve its targeted goal of making education totally free from all forms of fees and significantly reducing other indirect costs related with attending school due to financial challenges. The government should solicit

for more funding to enable the sustainability of this program, as well as the indirect cost associated with schooling through the provision of free uniforms, bags, textbooks, shoes, and even the school meal program to encourage girls and keep them in school. The provision of bicycles would facilitate transportation since most children walk long distances to reach school. With these and other incentives, families will be encouraged to prioritize the education of their daughters. Vocational schools should be made available and affordable for girls interested in acquiring job-related skills like hair styling, electronics, catering, smock weaving, and bead making.

In the Bawku West district who or when a woman should marry mostly depends on the parents, families, and community members who believe early marriage keeps girls safe and reduces pregnancy out of wedlock. To challenge this idea, I suggest the introduction of educational campaigns targeted at raising the awareness of the implications and consequences of child marriage. All stakeholders, including the media, entertainment industry, traditional, and religious authorities, should rally against child marriage and provide accurate information at religious/ traditional gatherings and on television shows. The negative health and social impact on the girl child and the nation should be clearly highlighted. Most importantly, I recommend that girls and women, especially victims of child marriage, should be empowered to be at the forefront of the fight against it. Community and national opportunities should be provided for victims of child marriage willing to share their stories and experiences. During such forums, schoolgirls could dramatize child marriage and the consequences. Also, I suggest educational campaign should be directed towards changing people's perception of gender role and expectations, especially within the Northern communities in Ghana. Educating community

members, leaders, and families will help change long-held views of child marriage and women's role more generally.

Realizing that child marriage stood in the way of Ghana attaining the international Sustainable Development Goals by 2030, the Ministry for Gender, Children and Social Protection recently established the Child Marriage Unit. The aim of this unit is to involve stakeholders, including legislators and government, to develop policies and strengthen existing laws on child marriage. In 2016 as part of its action plan, the Unit launched a 10-year national strategic framework to end child marriage by 2030. Included in the action plan is the establishment of laws and policies prohibiting child marriage. However, the Children's Act, stating that anybody who marries off a child before his/her 18<sup>th</sup> birthday "commits an offence and is liable on summary conviction to a fine not exceeding ₵5 million or to a term of imprisonment not exceeding one year or to both" has been in existence for 20 years (The Children's Act, 1998, p.9). Despite this law, the rate of child marriage is still high. Arguably, the law is not effectively implemented and enforced. Or the ineffectiveness of the law could be attributed to the lack of awareness of its existence among the populace. People and victims may fail to report to the right authorities for effective implementation. I therefore suggest the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection collaborate with the Ministry of Education to include in the educational curriculum key information on child marriage, highlighting the government's stand, as well as the consequences for all perpetrators. Law enforcement agencies like the police and DOVVSU must ensure that the few reported cases are adequately dealt with in accordance with the Act. This will deter parents, families, and communities from engaging in the practice. I also suggest new laws make provisions for "whistleblowers" to encourage people, not only victims, to report the incidence of child marriage within their communities. Socio-cultural beliefs

which serve as barriers to reporting incidences of child marriages to the appropriate authorities should be acknowledged and addressed.

The Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection and Child Marriage Unit aims to empower girls and boys and actively involve the community to ensure positive change in attitudes to child marriage and gender role expectations. It hopes to increase girls' access to good quality education, to sexual and reproductive health information, and to services to empower them. Sustainable funding is needed for the Ministry to achieve these goals. Therefore, I suggest the government allocate funding for the implementation of this agenda. The Ministry can also partner with other civil society organizations like Plan Ghana, UNICEF, World Vision etc. to raise funds for effective service delivery.

One of the primary factors contributing to child marriage is poverty. I found that during economic difficulties, the girl child is mostly viewed as a means to an end. Marrying her off irrespective of her age is seen as an escape route from poverty. I recommend that specialized programs to enhance the economic abilities of low-income families be developed in the Bawku West district. This will help reduce the overdependence on bride price to offset debt or provide the basic needs of the family. Unlike Canada and other Western countries where social support is readily available to low-income families, Ghana offers no social assistance. I suggest that financial support and incentives should be made accessible to low-income families to reduce the dependence on trading daughters for cows.

I recommend researchers build on this work by conducting national qualitative and quantitative studies on child marriage and IPV in Ghana. Such research will provide a more comprehensive understanding of women's perceptions and experiences of child marriage and IPV. Future work should include comparative studies on the knowledge, understanding, and



perceptions of child brides who have had access to formal services and those who have not. Each group's understandings, perceptions, and experiences are likely to be shaped differently.

Interactions with Plan Ghana, CARE, UNICEF, Action Aid or World Vision may influence women's understanding and experiences. Knowing how things change through such interactions could shape future policy.

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## APPENDICES

**Table 1. Participant Demographic Data**

Category	Frequency (N=15)
<b>Current Age</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 18-29</li> <li>• 30-39</li> <li>• 40-49</li> </ul>	9 3 3
<b>Age at marriage</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 13-16</li> </ul>	15
<b>Religion</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Muslims</li> <li>• Christians</li> </ul>	13 2
<b>Employment Status</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Employed - informal</li> </ul>	15
<b>Education</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No formal education</li> <li>• Some form of education (primary and junior high level)</li> </ul>	10 5
<b>Marital status</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Married</li> <li>• Type of marriage</li> </ul>	15 Polygynous



## Appendix A: Recruitment letter

My name is **Harriet Afrakomah Amoah**, a graduate student at Memorial University of Newfoundland, Canada. I am conducting a research project titled “*Experiences of intimate partner violence in child marriages in Ghana*” for my master’s degree.

My research seeks to examine the experiences of intimate partner violence (IPV) among women who married as children in Ghana. Specifically, I would like to invite you to participate in a 1-hour interview in which your knowledge, perception, and experiences of child marriage and IPV will be explored as a Ghanaian woman who married before 18 years. Similarly, I will explore your perspective on the socio-cultural and economic factors likely to influence early marriage in Ghana.

Interviews will be conducted on a one-on-one basis and interview questions will be semi-structured, with the intention of empowering you to share your experiences, while I also obtain deeper insight and answers to my research questions. The interview will be scheduled between the hours of 10 am and 4 pm daily. I will be glad to arrange with you on a suitable day, time and place for this interview after you consent to be part of the study. This means you can choose when and where your interview will take place. For example, you can opt for us to meet at a conducive place within your neighborhood if this is far from your house. Please note that your involvement in this research is completely voluntary, and you can choose to participate or opt out of the study. Also, there may be some emotional/psychological risks to participating in this study given the sensitive nature of some of the questions. However, since Dr. Tenkorang’s larger project which examined the help-seeking behaviours of female IPV victims in Ghana, has support from and established contact with trained counselors from the Domestic Violence and Victim Support Unit (DOVVSU), I will be able to refer you to these same counsellors for your

counselling needs. I will also make every effort to protect your anonymity, thus any information you provide will be kept confidential. You have the choice to skip/refuse any question that you do not want to answer, as well as end the interview at any time if you feel distressed or uncomfortable. Your identity will be protected with pseudonyms and I will make sure that the information you provide cannot be traced back to you in reports, presentations, and publication. Your information will be kept under secured conditions for a minimum of five years after which it will be discarded.

If you are interested in participating in this study or would like additional information to enable you to make a decision about participation, kindly contact me via phone on **0240830204** or email at **haamoah@mun.ca**, or Dr. Eric Tenkorang on **0244599753** to arrange for a suitable meeting time and place for the interview.

The proposal for this research has been reviewed by the Interdisciplinary Committee on Ethics in Human Research and found to be in compliance with Memorial University's ethics policy. If you have ethical concerns about the research, such as your rights as a participant, you may contact the Chairperson of the ICEHR at [icehr.chair@mun.ca](mailto:icehr.chair@mun.ca) or by telephone at +1 709-864-2861

*Thank-you in advance for considering my request,*

## Appendix B. Informed Consent Form

Title of Sub-Project: Experiences of intimate partner violence (IPV) in child marriages in Ghana

Researcher(s): Harriet Afrakomah Amoah, *department of Gender Studies, Memorial University of Newfoundland, Canada, 0240830204 or email at haamoah@mun.ca*

Supervisor(s): Dr. Patricia Dold, Department of Gender Studies, Memorial University of Newfoundland, Canada. [pdold@mun.ca](mailto:pdold@mun.ca)

Dr. Eric Tenkorang, *Department of Sociology, Memorial University of Newfoundland, Canada. [eytenkorang@mun.ca](mailto:eytenkorang@mun.ca)*

My name is Harriet Afrakomah Amoah and as part of my Master of Gender Studies thesis I am conducting research under the supervision of Dr. Patricia Dold and Dr. Eric Tenkorang.

In addition to participating in the research project “*The help- seeking behaviors of female IPV victims in Ghana*,” as outlined in the preceding consent form, I am asking for your consent to gather and use your data for my sub-project and Master of Gender Studies thesis titled “**Experiences of intimate partner violence in child marriages in Ghana**”. In other to for you understand my project and your role in it, I have prepared this overview of the process for us to read/hear together before you consent or decline to participate.

This study will be carried out within a period of 2 months. Taking you through this process will give you a basic knowledge of what to expect from the research and what your participation will entail. I will also describe your right to withdraw from the study at any time, confidentiality, anonymity etc. This research seeks to examine intimate partner violence (IPV) in

Ghana, precisely the IPV experiences among women who married as children (before 18 year). I intend to explore further, your knowledge, understanding, and opinions of IPV as a woman who married as child (before 18 years), the circumstances leading to such experience and the socio-cultural and economic factors likely to influence early marriage in Ghana. Information collected from you during this interview will form the data for my Master's thesis project. Also, I will only use the data for my thesis, and presentations and publications directly related to this thesis.

### **Possible Risks and Discomforts**

I will be asking questions about your knowledge, perceptions, and understanding of IPV and child marriage. I do recognize that some of the interview questions may trigger some emotional discomfort /stress and this may cause you to remember certain painful experiences and feel uncomfortable. However, to limit/mitigate this possible discomfort, Dr. Tenkorang's larger project has support from and established contact with trained counselors from the Domestic Violence and Victim Support Unit (DOVVSU). I will be able to refer you to these same counsellors for your counselling needs, in case you require their services. I will also make available to you the contact information of the DOVVSU counsellors assigned to this project, so you can contact them in case you feel threatened or experience violence, as a result of your participation in this study. Further, you are free to skip/refuse any question you do not want to answer, as well as end the interview at any time if you feel distressed or uncomfortable. To ensure accuracy, I will review with you the transcript of your interview to verify that it reflects your responses in the interview and that the information captured is what you want to convey. You also have the freedom to withdraw before, during and 2 months after the interview. I will ensure this by providing you with my contact information in Ghana, and in Canada, in case you

desire to get in touch to withdraw your participation within two months after the interview. If you decide to withdraw from the study within two months of the interview, all your data/information will be deleted and destroyed to protect your privacy. Five years after the study, all interview recordings and transcripts will be destroyed, apart from those included in my Master's thesis and any related academic publications.

### **Possible Benefits**

This project will benefit you and the community by raising awareness and providing detailed information on the knowledge and perceptions that women of varied age groups give to their IPV experiences. Furthermore, it is an avenue for you to develop your knowledge and understanding of intimate partner violence and child marriage in Ghana. This study is also relevant to national policy formulation in Ghana. This is because, information provided by you on your knowledge, perceptions and experiences of IPV as a woman who married as a child (before 18years) can help tailor interventions/formulate policies that will be based on your experiences and narration of your story.

### **Confidentiality**

I do my best to protect and respect your anonymity and confidentiality. Nevertheless, it is important that you are aware that absolute confidentiality cannot be guaranteed. However, many measures will be taken to protect anonymity and confidentiality of the data collected from you.

These measures include using pseudonyms for participants to make sure that the information they provide cannot be traced back to them in reports, presentations, and publication. Thus, I will give each of your fictitious names instead of your real name and remove all other identifying information. Also, to protect and preserve your confidentiality, I will assign a unique

code to you. This unique code, as well your pseudonyms, will then be used in your interview guide, interview recording and interview transcript. Likewise, your consent to participate includes your consent for me to include quotations from your interview transcripts and excerpts from field notes in my final thesis, publications and public/future presentations. But, in such instances, I will make sure there are no identifying makers and will use a pseudonym to prevent any breach of confidentiality.

Truly, I do appreciate your involvement in this study, and will do my best not to compromise your anonymity and confidentiality. All research materials including interviews, voice recordings, transcripts, field notes, etc. will be secured on my password protected laptop and stored in a locked cabinet to safeguard your anonymity/privacy. Besides myself, only my supervisors will gain access to these recordings and other research materials such as the typed interview transcripts, informed consent forms, and my field notes. I will also adopt the World Health Organization's guidelines to conducting research on domestic violence and minimizing the risk of interviews to participants. This will be ensured by interviewing only one woman per household and providing detailed information about the nature of the study to only recruited participants.

All documents, including electronics and hard copies related to data collection and analysis will be kept for a minimum of five years after the completion of my thesis. I intend to shred or burn the hard copies and scramble any electronic data after 5 years.

Findings from this study will be disseminated through conference presentations and publications in peer-reviewed journals. I will also share the findings with you by providing a summary report of this study to domestic violence agencies in Ghana, which you can access.

Additionally, you can contact the Gender Studies Department of Memorial University to request/access a summary report of this study. Also, by clicking on the link provided below, you can publicly access my thesis through QEII library, Memorial University (<http://collections.mun.ca/cdm/search/collection/theses>).

### **Compensation**

There will be no compensation for your participation in this study interview. However, I sincerely appreciate your time and effort to help me learn about your knowledge, perceptions and experience of IPV as a woman who married before 18 years, in order to know the different subjective meanings women of varied age groups give to their IPV experiences.

### **Voluntary Participation and Right to Leave the Research**

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary, and you can refuse or withdraw at any time, without any repercussions from me. You can decide to end your participation at any time during the interview. You may also withdraw from the study up to two months after data collection. I will make available to you my contact information while in Ghana, and when I return to Canada, in case you desire to get in touch to withdraw your participation. When you contact me, you will have to mention your unique code/number given to you during the interview, so I can easily identify and deal with your data appropriately. Since this number is written on your consent form, I encourage you to store this document in a safe place. The numbers have been generated and assigned to you randomly and will be used for the purposes of this study only.

**Consent:**

This is a supplement to the informed consent form for Dr. Eric Tenkorang's project. Signing of the larger project's consent form and initialing this page signifies that you have read and understand this supplemental information. All information provided in the larger project's consent form regarding confidentiality, anonymity, storage of data, etc. applies equally to my project, unless otherwise stated. Once published, my thesis will be publicly available at Memorial's QEII library.

If you have any questions about your participation, or how your data will be used for this sub-project, please contact me or my supervisor using the information provided above.

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Participant Initials

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Date

The proposal for this research has been reviewed by the Interdisciplinary Committee on Ethics in Human Research and found to be in compliance with Memorial University's ethics policy. If you have ethical concerns about the research, such as the way you have been treated or your rights as a participant, you may contact the Chairperson of the ICEHR at [icehr@mun.ca](mailto:icehr@mun.ca) or by telephone at 709-864-2861.

**Oral Consent:**



I read and explained this consent form to the participant before receiving the participant's consent, and the participant had knowledge of its contents and appeared to understand it.

---

Identification code of participant

---

Date

**Researcher's Signature:**

I have explained this study to the best of my ability. I invited questions and gave answers. I believe that the participant fully understands what is involved in being in the study, any potential risks of the study and that he or she has freely chosen to be in the study.

---

Signature of Principal Investigator

---

Date

## **Appendix C: Participant Interview guide/ schedule**

Date of interview:

Interview number:

Time interview begun:

Time interview ended:

### **Introduction:**

- *First tell the participant my name and where I am from.*
- *Will then give them approximately how many hours it will take to complete the interview (1hour).*
- *Go through the consent form with participants so they could sign or give me a recorded verbal consent if they can not either read or write after they agree to be part of the study.*

*Before we begin, do you have any questions or need clarification about this study?*

## **Section 1: Demographic and socio-economic characteristics**

1. How old are you?
2. Have you ever attended any formal education (probe: What is your highest level of education?)
3. What is your religious affiliation?
4. What ethnic group do you belong to?
5. Are you currently working? (probe: If yes; what type of work?)
6. What is your marital status?
7. At what age did you get married?

## **Section 2: knowledge and experience of Child marriage**

8. What in your knowledge is child marriage?

**Follow up:** Do you think you were mature enough to marry at that time?

9. Can you tell me more about your marriage and experiences?
10. Do you think some customs or tradition, or attitudes promote or encourage girls' marrying at an early age in Ghana?

**Follow up:** What in your view are some of the factors or practices that promote child marriage in Ghana? Are these practices adhered to in recent times?

**Follow up:** Can you tell me more about what influenced you getting married early?

## **Section 3: Intimate partner violence/domestic violence**

11. What in your opinion is intimate partner/ domestic violence?
12. What would you describe or classify as intimate partner violence?
13. In your opinion, can a husband discipline his wife? (probe, what ways or form can this discipline be administered?)

**Follow up:** let's say your husband often coerced you to have sex with him, or beats, insult, push, use derogatory words at you or throw things at you, restricts your movements or determines whom you see and visit etc.

- I. How would you classify these actions?
- II. Prompt: will you consider these acts; sexual, physical, emotional, psychological abuse or controlling behaviour or mere discipline?

*(These hypothetical situations will be used to further explore respondent's knowledge of intimate partner violence as and when the need arises)*

14. How would you describe your previous experiences of IPV in a marriage you entered before the age of 18 or as a child?
15. In your opinion, what factors or circumstances informed or contributed to this violence?
16. How do you perceive your current IPV experiences? **Follow up:** do you think your past experiences of IPV as a woman who married before age 18 has shaped your current experiences in relationships? **Follow up:** if yes/no, how?

#### **Section 4: Power differential in child marriages**

17. How old was your husband when you got married?
18. In your opinion who has more control/ authority in marriages generally? Who has more authority in your marriage?

**19. Who makes major** decisions in the home? What role do you play in such decision?

**Prompt:** Who decides on whether or not to have children? Who determines the number of children? Who decides when to use contraceptives or to have sex? Who determines the type of meal to cook? Who makes financial decisions in the household?

20. In your opinion, how are men and women socialized in society?

**Follow up:** How has this influenced your perceptions and experiences of IPV as a woman.

## **Section 5: Conclusion**

21. Do you have any questions or comments to be addressed? Or Any clarification on the issues discussed?

We have come to the end of the interview, thank you for your participation and cooperation.